



MONASH University

My First Book of Greek Myths:
Retelling Ancient Myths
to Modern Children

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Abstract

Children's literature is one of the most visible contexts in which the myths of ancient Greece are retold today. In this thesis I argue that contemporary retellings of these myths produced for children and young adults deserve recognition as a significant cultural phenomenon and warrant more sustained critical attention than they have previously received. Over the last four or so decades, scores of retellings have been published, building on a storytelling tradition that can be traced back to Nathaniel Hawthorne and Charles Kingsley and includes the influential mid-twentieth century storyteller Roger Lancelyn Green. This thesis engages with more than seventy diverse publications, including picture books for very young readers, young adult fiction, retellings of individual myths and anthology collections.

In this thesis I ask why do we retell Greek myth, and why do we do it to children? Why do these ancient stories continue to exert such a hold on their audiences? What does the world of myth look like? And to what degree can a retelling diverge from an original source before it ceases to be identifiable as retelling?

This thesis is structured around the ideas of the child, the myth and the text, and examines the myriad intersections between these concepts. It adopts multiple methodologies, employing narratology, psychoanalysis and other modes of literary criticism to analyse this corpus of texts and the ways in which the myths have been reworked. Moreover, it examines the ideological motivations for inducting a new generation of readers into this ancient storytelling tradition, and addresses the ways that they communicate both with children and their adult guardians. I argue that many texts are self-conscious about the conditions within which they will be read or performed. Metafictional and intertextual elements feature prominently in many retellings, and the motifs of weaving and storage are regularly employed as symbols of the complex shape and the enduring survival of the mythic tradition. It seems likely that in the future mythic retellings will become increasingly self-reflexive.

The project has a personal dimension to it. My own childhood encounters with mythic retellings have played a formative role in influencing the course of my academic study and in particular, setting the parameters and scope of this thesis. Now with young children of my own, I am mindful of my new role and responsibilities in sharing the stories with them. In addition, I am interested in retellings which feature an Australian perspective, arguing that they demonstrate that ancient Greek stories can remain relevant in a very different cultural and temporal context.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signature:

Print Name:

Date:

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I wish to dedicate this thesis to my three children: Leo, Miles and Audrey. I am so glad that you love stories too.

Introduction

When I was eight years old, my father gave me Roger Lancelyn Green's *Tales of the Greek Heroes* and *The Tale of Troy*.¹ First published in the 1950s, these stories were packaged as lightweight, unassuming paperbacks, illustrated with scratchy black and white etchings by Betty Middleton Sandford. Dad would read me a chapter at bedtime. I was transfixed. I can remember feeling so disappointed, even a bit agitated, when we finished reading. The stories struck such a chord; I was hungry for more. These humble little books triggered an enduring fascination with the Greek myths and the world from which they came.² Deborah H. Roberts points out that my experience is a common one. She writes that the myths 'are typically encountered in childhood, when they make a strong, lasting impression'.³ I can say with conviction that Green's texts, discovered at such a formative time of my life, have had a direct and powerful influence upon my career path.

Green's work is significant for the way in which he ties together the disparate legends into a seamless narrative, beginning with Zeus' rise to power as the lord of the Olympians and charting the adventures of his mortal children, right through to the Trojan War and its aftermath. Because they were the first versions of the myths that I encountered, his accounts have retained a special primacy for me, even after I went to university and discovered that the ancient texts upon which Green was drawing were far from unified or cohesive.⁴ At this time I also learned that some of my Dad's pronunciations (like *Dionysius*) were inaccurate. Nevertheless, I am certain that the experience of hearing the myths read aloud, in an echo of their performance in an ancient context, has contributed to the profound impact that these stories have had on me.

I still have these books today. After more than twenty-five years and countless rereadings, they are looking a little tatty. The paper is yellowing and dog-eared. Inside each front cover my name is

¹ Roger Lancelyn Green, *The Tale of Troy* (London: Penguin, 1958; 1994); *Tales of the Greek Heroes* (London: Penguin, 1958; 2009).

² Lisa Maurice writes that children's literature is 'often the first meeting point with the worlds of ancient Greece and Rome.' Lisa Maurice, "Children, Greece and Rome: Heroes and Eagles," in *The Reception of Ancient Greece and Rome in Children's Literature: Heroes and Eagles*, ed. Lisa Maurice (Boston: Brill, 2015). p.3.

³ Deborah H. Roberts, "Quae Supersunt: The Reception of Classical Mythology in Modern Handbooks and Collections," *Classical Bulletin* 84, no. 1 (2008).

⁴ Geoffrey Miles admits to 'an irrational conviction' that his first point of contact with Greek mythology, Aubrey de Sélincourt's *Odysseus the Wanderer*, 'was the true version.' Geoffrey Miles, "Chasing Odysseus in Twenty-First-Century Children's Fiction," in *The Reception of Ancient Greece and Rome in Children's Literature*, ed. Lisa Maurice (Leiden: Brill, 2015). p.213

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inscribed in the careful, cursive handwriting of my childhood. I am eagerly anticipating the time when my own children are of an age when I can read these books to them.

Children's literature is one of the most prominent contexts within which ancient Greek myths are retold today. Deborah Roberts has recognised the ideological shifts which underpin the refashioning of these tales as children's literature, stating that over 'the last two centuries, classical mythology has been increasingly defined as a subject for children and has consequently been reworked in accord with prevailing ideas of what is suitable for child readers.'⁵ The children's author Rosemary Sutcliff, whose retelling of the *Iliad* is examined in Chapter Four, attributes their transformation to a special affinity that children have with the material. She writes that the 'young have a strong feeling for the primitive and fundamental things of life. That is why myths and legends certainly not meant for children in the first place have been largely taken over by them.'⁶ During antiquity mythological tales fulfilled a wide range of functions, from the sacred to the political, and as Sutcliff highlights, children were not their primary audience. But as Chapter One will reveal, the practice of telling myths to children did take place in ancient times, and so too did critical debate concerning the tradition.

In modern times, scholarly analysis of these texts as a site of reception is relatively rare. This thesis argues that the genre makes a major contribution to the continuation and the reshaping of the mythological tradition. Lisa Maurice has drawn attention to the fact that '[u]ntil recently...little comprehensive work had been done on the subject of the reception of the ancient world in children's literature.'⁷ As a consequence, children's texts which retell myth warrant more critical attention than they have received up until now. Just as children's literature more generally has struggled to be recognised as a deserving subject of serious critical study,⁸ retellings of Greek myth produced for children have tended to be overlooked by those who regard themselves as serious scholars of the Classics. I will argue that these works deserve recognition as an influential form of classical reception.

⁵ Roberts. p.57

⁶ Rosemary Sutcliff, "History and Time," in *Historical Fiction for Children: Capturing the Past*, ed. Fiona M. Collins and Judith Graham (London: David Fulton, 2001). p.112

⁷ 'Until recently...little comprehensive work had been done on the subject of the reception of the ancient world in children's literature.' Maurice. p.3

⁸ Michael Cadden, ed. *Telling Children's Stories: Narrative Theory and Children's Literature* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2010). p.xiii

Introduction

Over the course of the last four decades, scores of retellings of the Greek myths, written in English, have been published for young readers.⁹ In this thesis I examine more than seventy of them. The corpus is wide ranging, encompassing story collections and anthologies, extended narratives for teenagers as well as picture books for the very young. Maurice has observed the absence of scholarly work on these texts in particular, writing that '[t]he importance of picture books as a sub-genre of children's literature has long been documented, but to date little, if any, attention has been paid to the reception of the classical world in these works.'¹⁰ This study engages with texts which explicitly retell specific tales, as well as those which draw upon Greek mythology in more subtle, indirect and complex ways.¹¹ Although they diverge in the way in which they approach, employ and frame mythology, it is nevertheless possible to identify common elements, tropes and ideological agendas within the corpus as a whole.

I will argue that the prevailing feature of these texts is their self-referentiality. While rewriting the stories from Greek myth, they are also telling about storytelling itself. Through the use of intertextual and metafictional elements, the texts persistently draw attention to their status as retellings, looking beyond their own textual borders to other versions of the same, oft-repeated tales. None claim to be the definitive version of the myth, and many rely on a reader having prior knowledge of a myth to understand and appreciate the subtleties of the reworking. Even in a text which promotes itself as 'the perfect introduction to Greek myth' (as Saviour Pirota's *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths* does),¹² there is an implicit suggestion of further reading of other versions. It seems clear that these texts consider themselves to be just the beginning of a reader's journey into myth; they are striving to incite a hunger to read more - and read more deeply. In this way, this project centres upon the relationship that these contemporary retellings have with the mythic tradition, and aims to explore the implications that these works have for the enduring influence, current relevance, and future status of classical mythology.

⁹ Antoinette Brazouski and Mary J. Klatt, *Children's Books on Ancient Greek and Roman Mythology: An Annotated Bibliography* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994). p.13.

¹⁰ Maurice. p.2

¹¹ Stephens and McCallum refer to these works as a form of 'generic intertextuality'. Cited in Elisabeth Rose Gruner, "Telling Old Tales Newly: Intertextuality in Young Adult Fiction for Girls," in *Telling Children's Stories: Narrative Theory and Children's Literature*, ed. Michael Cadden (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2010). p.4

¹² Saviour Pirota, *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths* (London: Orchard Books, 2003).

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This project is significant in that it addresses what has happened to classical mythology in the present period. The majority of the texts it references were published between the 1980s and today, though it also addresses the impact of earlier writers including Nathaniel Hawthorne, Charles Kingsley, and of course Roger Lancelyn Green. It asks how contemporary retellings position themselves within the extended tradition of telling myth, how and why such stories maintain their powerful hold, and how and why myths have come to be retold to children in particular. By combining a study of ancient myth (and its afterlife) with contemporary children's literature, this thesis attempts to make sense of the power of story. Crucially, it recognises these contemporary retellings of myth as a legitimate object for study, challenging the objections raised by both classicists and scholars of children's literature about their value and worth.¹³ Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it makes a contribution to the field of classical reception studies. Within this increasingly significant field,¹⁴ making sense of the afterlife of myth seems ever more important.¹⁵

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This thesis employs a number of modes of textual analysis as part of its investigation. The interdisciplinary scope of the project, sitting as it does between the fields of Classical Studies and Children's Literature, and blending the retelling of myth within ancient and contemporary contexts, means that no single theoretical approach is able to frame the range of questions posed. Instead, a methodology has been woven together out of strands from a range of different positions. It seems fitting that this method should be conceived of as an interwoven fabric of multiple approaches, since weaving itself looms large within this thesis. It figures not only as a prominent motif within many Greek myths, but also as an evocative metaphor for the way in which the myths themselves have been passed down, reworked and tied together.

¹³ See Maria Nikolajeva, *Children's Literature Comes of Age: Towards a New Aesthetic* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1996). p.7 on children's literature gaining the right to be literary.

¹⁴ 'It is now accepted that reception is an integral part of classics itself' writes Maurice. p.4

¹⁵ According to Helen Lovatt, the discipline of Classical Studies has ongoing struggles with engaging potential students. She suggests children's retellings as a possible solution. 'How better to do that than to offer them the chance to think critically about the books that first drew their attention to the classical world?' Helen Lovatt, "Gutting the *Argonautica*? How to Make Jason and the Argonauts Suitable for Children," in *Classics for All: Reworking Antiquity in Mass Culture*, ed. Duncan Lowe and Kim Shahabudin (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009). p.18

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The domain of narrative theory, which aims to illuminate the formal structures of story, provides a framework for examining these texts. The field supplies the tools for exploring how the texts convey aspects of character, the mythological setting, and the concept of time, among other narrative elements. In addition, narratology supports an investigation of the literary qualities of these texts, which helps me in establishing these works are worthwhile objects of critical study.¹⁶

Narrative theory also helps to reveal the significance of the process of retelling the same story countless times. Karl Kroeber has sought to highlight the significance of the concept of repetition in storytelling, including within the context of traditional tales. He writes that 'stories improve with retelling, are endlessly retold, and are *told in order to be retold*.'¹⁷ The experience of becoming a parent has given me new insight into this comment. Repetition is a governing force in the life of the young child, and nowhere more so than in their love of reading the same book over and over again.¹⁸ In this way, the repetition principle is at work twice over within these texts, forming part of the repeated retelling of a myth, while also being subject to repeated rereading.

Monica Fludernik has pointed out that the discipline of narratology is text based, with 'the contexts of production, publication, distribution and reception of narratives...on the periphery.'¹⁹ Yet this thesis will not only explore the texts in terms of their content, but also engage with the processes of their production, circulation and reception. Attention will also be paid to the significance of peritextual detail found in introductions, author's notes and other addenda. The way in which these books are packaged and promoted is particularly significant on account of the cultural significance with which they are invested.

One narratological device which has particular currency within this project is metafiction, where the fictional status of a narrative is made explicit. The reader's absorption is abruptly disturbed as they

¹⁶ Michael Cadden asserts that the field of narrative theory has helped to legitimise children's literature, and that the benefits run both ways: 'It surprises some that children's and young adult literature has much to offer the world of critical theory.' Cadden. p.xiii

¹⁷ Karl Kroeber, *Retelling/Rereading: The Fate of Storytelling in Modern Times* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990). p.1 (author's emphasis)

¹⁸ Nikolajeva asks '[a]ren't children cleverer when they demand to hear the same fairy tale or book over and over again.' Nikolajeva. p.55

¹⁹ Monica Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology*, trans. Patricia Häusler-Greenfield and Monica Fludernik (London and New York: Routledge, 2009). p. 8-9.

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are reminded that they are engaged in the reading of a story. Among the most visible metafictional devices are direct address to the reader, references to the genesis, performance and the reading of tales, and the framing of one story within another.²⁰ Along with more complex forms, such moments figure frequently throughout recent retellings of myth. This thesis will propose that metafiction is one of the corpus' most striking features, indicating that myth is becoming increasingly self-conscious about its own reception. In *Adaptation and Appropriation*, Julie Sanders suggests that reworkings of traditional narratives have a propensity towards this kind of self-scrutiny, writing that '[w]hat mythical appropriations facilitate therefore is a means for contemporary authors to carry out self-conscious investigations into the artistic process.'²¹ The fact that young readers may not always be aware of the complexity of such narrative devices makes their prominence all the more interesting.

In attempting to analyse this corpus of interconnected texts, Kristeva's understanding of intertextuality provides a crucial theoretical base. It offers a method for exploring the relationship between different retellings of the same myth, as well as the ways in which texts allude to other myths in the tradition. According to the central tenet of intertextuality, every text is 'constructed as a mosaic of quotations,'²² bearing the traces, and remaining in dialogue, with other texts. Importantly, intertextuality also helps to justify these children's books as a legitimate response to the classical tradition. One of the major aims of this thesis is to defend the value of these rewritings, which have been derided both by classicists and scholars of children's literature. While classicists have lamented the reduction of formerly grand narratives into superficial kitsch,²³ some scholars of children's literature have raised their concerns with the perpetuation of grand narratives in the first place.²⁴

²⁰ Robyn McCallum, "Very Advanced Texts: Metafiction and Experimental Work," in *Understanding Children's Literature*, ed. Peter Hunt (London and New York: Routledge, 1999). p.138-9

²¹ Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006). p.65

²² Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980). p.66

²³ Brazouski and Klatt. p.xi; Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Other People's Myths: The Cave of Echoes* (New York: Macmillan, 1988). p.131

²⁴ John Stephens and Robyn McCallum, *Retelling Stories: Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children's Literature* (New York: Garland, 1998).

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The notion of intertextuality also helps to frame a study of the significance of reworking traditional narratives.²⁵ The politics and poetics of this process remains a relatively understudied field of enquiry, although some help comes from recent work on fairy tales, where a similar kind of reworking has taken place. The basic frame of a myth provides the scope for authors to develop characterisation, motivation and cause, and even a historical basis for some events. Some recent texts have sought to redress myth's inherent ideological problems by reworking narrative structures and giving voice to characters previously denied a position from which to speak (particularly women and the young).²⁶

In other cases, mythological motifs are recontextualised in order to highlight how the ancient world of myth impacts upon or continues to endure in the contemporary age. For example, Paul Zindel's *Harry and Hortense at Hormone High* and Nadia Wheatley's short story 'Melting Point', from the collection *The Night Tolkien Died*, both draw upon the myth of Icarus to articulate the painful experience of modern adolescence.²⁷ A host of other works, some of which reside on the boundary between young adult and mature fantasy fiction, including Marie Phillips' *Gods Behaving Badly* and Leslie What's *Olympic Games*, are based on the premise that the Olympian gods have survived into the modern age, and are now living and working among us.²⁸ This interest in the relationship between the ancient and contemporary worlds, which is also addressed in the time-travel stories like Jon Scieszka's *It's All Greek to Me*, Francesca Simon's *Helping Hercules*, and Charlie Carter's *Destroy Troy*, highlights a new trend in the retelling of the Greek myths.²⁹ These texts depend upon the reader being already familiar with the important structures, individuals and tropes of classical mythology. The pleasure afforded to readers upon recognition of the intertext has been noted by a number of critics.³⁰ 'Intertextuality

²⁵ 'Story patterns which are re-used and reworked in one text after another are one of the most obvious examples of inter-textuality' Margery Hourihan, *Deconstructing the Hero: Literary Theory and Children's Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997). p.13

²⁶ On 'childist' rewritings, see Nikolajeva. p.10

²⁷ Paul Zindel, *Harry and Hortense at Hormone High* (Des Plaines: Bantam Books, 1984); Nadia Wheatley, "Melting Point," in *The Night Tolkien Died* (Sydney: Random House, 1994).

²⁸ Marie Phillips, *Gods Behaving Badly: A Novel* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2007); Leslie What, *Olympic Games* (San Francisco: Tachyon Publications, 2004).

²⁹ Jon Scieszka, *The Time Warp Trio: It's All Greek to Me* (New York: Puffin Books, 1999); Francesca Simon, *Helping Hercules* (London: Orion Books, 1999); Charlie Carter, *Destroy Troy: Battle Boy 3* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 2009).

³⁰ Nikolajeva. p.156; Isabelle Nières, "Writers Writing a Short History of Children's Literature within Their Texts," in *Aspects and Issues in the History of Children's Literature*, ed. Maria Nikolajeva (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995). p.51

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presupposes the reader's active participation in the decoding process; in other words, it is the reader who makes the intertextual connection.³¹

While narratology forms a foundation for this thesis' critique of stories and their structure, psychoanalysis provides a theoretical basis for exploring the deep psychological hold that such stories continue to exert, several millennia after they were first told. The field gives insight into the ways in which myths play out the desires and anxieties of the subconscious, as well as providing insight into how such material might impact upon a young reader. For example, the portrayal of family relationships (with sons assuming the roles of their fathers, usurped brothers regaining what is rightfully theirs, even the complexity of familial loyalties and factions on Olympus) has the potential to speak directly to a child experiencing similar tensions in his or her own family unit. As Bruno Bettelheim has shown, traditional stories provide a means for children to work through their own issues, providing solace, comfort, and even justification for uncomfortable emotions.³² Although Bettelheim's work has been criticised for unacknowledged borrowing of previously published material,³³ and his professional character as a scholar and therapist has also come under scrutiny,³⁴ I believe that his key statements about the importance of traditional stories in the lives of young children hold true.

In seeking to uncover the underlying codes and messages present within these retellings, the project also draws upon the principles of deconstruction. According to Jacques Derrida, deconstruction is not a mode of analysis or a method for making sense of a text, but rather a means of describing the multiple meanings already (and always) present within a narrative.³⁵ Roland Barthes has shown that an author is not in control of the range of interpretations that arise from a text, nor even consciously aware of the implications of the messages which their text contains.³⁶ This point has particular relevance with

³¹ Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott, *How Picture Books Work* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006). p.228

³² Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976).

³³ Among other charges, Alan Dundes details his 'wholesale borrowing of key ideas.' Alan Dundes, "Bruno Bettelheim's Uses of Enchantment and Abuses of Scholarship," *The Journal of American Folklore* 104, no. 411 (1991). p.80

³⁴ 'His knowledge of children's literature, reading habits, and preferences was abysmally low.' Jack Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1979; 2002). p.207

³⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

³⁶ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image Music Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967; 1977).

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regards to the frequent use of metafictional elements within mythic rewritings, some of which it would seem, may not be under the author's control. Instead, it is as if the mode of retelling myth, with its inextricable relationship to the mythic tradition, inevitably leads to metafictional play, regardless of the author's intentions.

The field of children's literature criticism provides yet another lens through which to approach these works. It provides a means of addressing issues of ideology, censorship, and the status of the classic.³⁷ The pedagogical function of these stories is also of significance, and this field of enquiry opens up the possibility of comparing the 'fictional' treatments of myth intended to be read for pleasure at home, with those designed as 'information books' for use in schools and other educational contexts.³⁸ There is, of course, no clear cut line between these two types of texts, and although the text-books about Ancient Greece do not tend to engage in creative reworkings of the story, instead attempting to reproduce a traditional, authentic account of a myth based on ancient sources, they nevertheless provide important commentary on the role of myth within ancient (and in some cases, contemporary) culture.

With this in mind, it is useful to explore how the teaching of classical studies (and classical mythology in particular) is depicted within some stories (such as Nadia Wheatley's short story 'Melting Point', which presents a uniquely Australian perspective, Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson* series, as well as select scenes within Francesca Simon's *Helping Hercules* and Jon Scieszka's *It's All Greek to Me*, in which the children stage a Greek mythology play at school.³⁹ The issue of the status of the classics in the twenty-first century classroom is a crucially important one, and these texts, in combination with the types of textbooks which are actually used as teaching resources, can provide rich insight.

Literature Review

³⁷ For an introduction to these issues, see John Stephens, *Language and Ideology in Children's Literature* (London and New York: Longman, 1992).

³⁸ For a general survey of this genre, see Rebecca J. Lukens, Jacquelin J. Smith, and Cynthia Miller Coffel, *A Critical Handbook of Children's Literature* (Boston: Pearson, 2003; 2013). p.305-8

³⁹ Wheatley; Rick Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* (London: Puffin, 2006); Simon; Scieszka.

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Mythological motifs figure across countless contemporary contexts. Marina Warner proposes that ancient myths 'enjoy a more vigorous life than we perhaps acknowledge, and exert more of an inspiration and influence than we think.'⁴⁰ A number of scholars identify children's literature as a particularly significant forum for the survival of these stories. While stating that '[f]olktales, myths and legends were never created for an audience of children', Maria Nikolajeva highlights that the field of children's literature is now permeated by texts which 'in some way or other are based on myth and folklore, not only directly, in subject matter or action, but also with respect to narrative, characteri[s]ation and the use of symbols.'⁴¹ Almost three decades ago, Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty noted that '[b]esides the Bible, there is one other body of literature that may still preserve our mythological classics, and that is the genre of children's literature.'⁴² More recently, Sheila Murnaghan has declared that '[o]ne area in which the classical tradition is currently most alive and popular is in works of children's literature inspired by mythology,'⁴³ while Helen Lovatt has remarked upon 'the range of children's literature that engages with the ancient world, and the continuing vibrancy of that engagement right up to the present day.'⁴⁴

As these statements testify, the reception of classical antiquity within children's literature has been the focus of increasing scholarly interest in recent years.⁴⁵ In 2009 the University of Wales hosted the first major academic conference on the subject, entitled 'Asterisks and Obelisks: Greece and Rome in Children's Literature'.⁴⁶ Since then a research project 'Our Mythical Childhood: Classics and Children's Literature between East and West' culminated in a 2013 conference at the University of Warsaw,⁴⁷ and in 2014 the Society for the Study of Childhood in the Past partnered with La Trobe University in

⁴⁰ Marina Warner, *Six Myths of Our Time: Managing Monsters* (London: Vintage, 1994). p.xiii

⁴¹ Fludernik. p.14-5

⁴² O'Flaherty. p.54

⁴³ Sheila Murnaghan, "Classics for Cool Kids: Popular and Unpopular Versions of Antiquity for Children," *Classical World* 104, no. 3 (2011). p.339

⁴⁴ Helen Lovatt, "Asterisks and Obelisks: Classical Receptions in Children's Literature," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 16, no. 3/4 (2009). p.508

⁴⁵ As recently as 2009, Helen Lovatt found it difficult to identify any classicists who were engaging 'with the rich mine of classical material produced each year for audiences under the age of sixteen.' Lovatt herself has played a crucial role in establishing the field. "Gutting the *Argonautica*? How to Make Jason and the Argonauts Suitable for Children." p.17

⁴⁶ "Asterisks and Obelisks: Classical Receptions in Children's Literature." The conference declares itself to be 'the first major conference to address the ways that children's literature engages with the Greek and Roman worlds.' p.508

⁴⁷ Katarzyna Marciniak, "Our Mythical Childhood: Classics and Children's Literature between East and West," <http://www.kamar.domeczek.pl/OMC%20www/Our%20Mythical%20Childhood.html>.

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Melbourne to host 'Telling Tales: Children, Narrative and Image'.⁴⁸ Between late 2014 and early 2015 Trinity College Library in Dublin hosted an exhibition entitled 'Upon the Wild Waves: A Journey Through Myth in Children's Books'.⁴⁹

These events have resulted in several important publications on the relationship between classical myth and children's literature, including *The Reception of Ancient Greece and Rome in Children's Literature: Heroes and Eagles*, edited by Lisa Maurice.⁵⁰ This collection, part of the series 'Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity', brings together the work of the leading classical reception scholars, including Deborah H. Roberts and Sheila Murnaghan. In other recent publications, both Roberts and Murnaghan have analysed contemporary mythic retellings in the context of the nineteenth century versions of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Charles Kingsley.⁵¹ While Roberts finds that while recent texts respond to the Kingsley's attempt to educate the young, the more playful, irreverent and above all visual publications tap into the tradition begun by Hawthorne.⁵² In her article, Murnaghan raises concerns regarding the more radical rewritings of traditional myths, insisting that '[w]e need to affirm the ongoing appeal of an unapologetic compendious antiquity.'⁵³

Scholars of children's literature have also taken an interest in the phenomenon. In their 1998 monograph *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture*, John Stephens and Robyn McCallum trace children's versions of the myths of Pandora and Icarus to argue for the persistence of the messages embedded within traditional tales. All stories are ideological, but Stephens and McCallum single out classical myth as 'the most ideologically charged area of retold stories because of the complex of significances which may be evoked.'⁵⁴ The weight of the tradition these retellings carry is heavy. They are credited with initiating 'children into aspects of a social heritage, transmitting many of a culture's central values

⁴⁸ La Trobe University "Scip 2014 Conference: Telling Tales: Children, Narrative and Image," <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/trendall/sscip>.

⁴⁹ Trinity College Dublin "Upon the Wild Waves," <https://www.tcd.ie/Library/about/exhibitions/wild-waves/>.

⁵⁰ Lisa Maurice, ed. *The Reception of Ancient Greece and Rome in Children's Literature: Heroes and Eagles*, Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity (Boston: Brill, 2015).

⁵¹ Murnaghan; Deborah H. Roberts, "From Fairy Tale to Cartoon: Collections of Greek Myth for Children," *Classical Bulletin* 84, no. 1 (2008).

⁵² 'Hawthorne's narrative playfulness, his juxtaposition of frame story and inner story, of ancient myth and modern consciousness, even his intertextuality, are best represented – if also much reduced – in the work of visual artists.' . p.72

⁵³ Murnaghan. p.353

⁵⁴ Stephens and McCallum.

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and assumptions and a body of shared allusions and experiences.⁵⁵ These scholars, hailing from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, are united in regarding contemporary children's retellings of classical myths as a legitimate subject for academic inquiry.

In this they stand apart from those who have sought to dismiss these texts as unworthy of critical study. Nicholas Tucker disdains the 'watered-down versions that may be insults to the truth and force of the original works.'⁵⁶ Using the same phrase, Alison Lurie writes that 'today bookstores are still full of bowdleri[s]ed and skewed volumes in which the energy and excitement and vivid detail of the stories are missing or watered down.'⁵⁷ O'Flaherty also considers the process of recasting myth for an audience of children a disappointing one, convinced that the power of the original is lost along the way. She claims that:

Most of our Western myths now survive only on the level of kitsch; the real myths, in their classic forms – are no longer ours – if indeed, they ever were. And kitsch mythology...does not have the power of nonkitsch mythology.⁵⁸

These critics measure the success of a contemporary retelling in terms of the degree to which it adheres to ancient versions of the myth it retells. Antoinette Brazouski and Mary Jane Klatt contend that 'scholars in the area of children's literature, not to mention classicists, tend to think that the best adaptations are those which can be easily comprehended by the child and yet retain both the plot and tone of the original work.'⁵⁹ Their *Children's Books on Ancient Greek and Roman Mythology: An Annotated Bibliography* includes over 300 entries, but the format of their annotated bibliography limits the scope and the depth of the analysis. At less than two pages, their 'Methodologies' section touches only briefly on the range of possible strategies for examining these texts. While maintaining a conservative stance, Brazouski and Klatt do concede that 'free retellings can be useful at times'.⁶⁰ Three years later *Myths and Hero Tales: A Cross Cultural Guide to Literature for Children and Young*

⁵⁵ Ibid. p.3

⁵⁶ Nicholas Tucker, *The Child and the Book: A Psychological and Literary Exploration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). p.71

⁵⁷ Alison Lurie, *Don't Tell the Grown Ups: The Subversive Power of Children's Literature* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1990). p.21

⁵⁸ O'Flaherty. p.49

⁵⁹ Brazouski and Klatt. p.xi

⁶⁰ Ibid. p.xi

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Adults, by Alethea Helbig and Agnes Perkins, was released.⁶¹ Marketed as a resource for teachers and librarians, the text lists almost 200 texts published between 1985 and 1996. In compiling comprehensive lists of late twentieth century retellings of myth, these works are an important resource, even more than two decades since their publication.

This belief that contemporary forms of myth represent a degeneration of those from the past is shared by Peter Green. On the subject of an adaptation of Homer's *Odyssey* made for television, he states that '[t]he feeling seems to be that you can trivialise, eviscerate, change, simplify, and rewrite all you've a mind to *as long as it gets the kids interested*. The question is, interested in what? Not Homer, that's for sure...'⁶² Green registers the role of the young as the inheritors of the dumbed-down tradition. Referring more broadly to the modern reworkings of traditional tales, Bruno Bettelheim has also mourned the transformation of fairy tales into 'empty-minded entertainment', writing that most children encounter the stories 'in prettified and simplified versions which subdue their meaning and rob them of all deeper significance.'⁶³

This denigration of contemporary retellings of myth seems in part an aspect of a more general negative attitude towards children's literature. As Peter Hunt has noted, the genre has traditionally struggled to be taken seriously, with its critics deriding it on the grounds that it is 'simple, ephemeral, popular, and designed for an immature audience.'⁶⁴ He mounts a defence, arguing that children's literature includes 'the most interesting and experimental of texts, in that they use mixed-media techniques which combine word, image, shape, and sound.'⁶⁵ Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott have also challenged these notions, asserting that the 'tendency...toward complexity and ambivalence' is present in all children's fiction.⁶⁶ It is my intention to demonstrate that many of the texts addressed in this thesis embody the level of sophistication to which Nikolajeva and Scott refer.

⁶¹ Alethea Helbig and Agnes Perkins, *Myths and Hero Tales: A Cross Cultural Guide to Literature for Children and Young Adults* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1997).

⁶² Peter Green, *From Ikaria to the Stars: Classical Mythification, Ancient and Modern* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004). p.295.

⁶³ Bettelheim. p.24

⁶⁴ Peter Hunt, *Criticism, Theory and Children's Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991). p.6

⁶⁵ Ibid. p.17

⁶⁶ Nikolajeva and Scott. p.260

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In *Books in the Life of a Child*, Maurice Saxby celebrates the endurance of the mythic tradition, noting that the classical myths 'have been retold countless times down the centuries'.⁶⁷ Importantly, he also acknowledges that some of the myths are told less frequently than others. Saxby is an interesting figure in that he straddles the line between critic and storyteller. As well as quoting his own retellings of myth in his academic writing, he has a tendency to make somewhat grandiose statements about the power of myth. That said, he is genuinely interested in the complex question of why ancient myths continue to be retold to children:

[A]part from the argument that myth can still help satisfy deep psychological needs, is the fact that a society's culture is embodied in its mythology. Not only is a close encounter with traditional literature a cross-cultural experience, it also provides an historical, social, aesthetic and spiritual perspective.⁶⁸

Stephens and McCallum remain critical of this assumption, promoted by both academics and storytellers, that the myths 'embody "timeless and universal" significance and are an indispensable part of Western cultural heritage, that they are metaphorical expressions of spiritual insights and that they address archetypal aspects of the human psyche.'⁶⁹ Not so very long ago, a knowledge of the classics – of the languages, history, and culture of ancient Greece and Rome - was a cornerstone of the Western educational system. Times have changed however, and the discipline no longer holds such a privileged position. Seth Lerer has charted the retelling of myth within the context of boys studying Greek and Latin within the school curriculum,⁷⁰ a subject Nadia Wheatley explores within her short story 'Melting Point', which I address in Chapter Eight of this thesis.⁷¹ Stephens and Robyn McCallum have written that this shift in educational policy, combined with the vast array of reading material now available to young readers 'would hardly seem surprising if classical myth had virtually disappeared from children's literature. It hasn't, however, and though it clearly survives as a lesser genre, new retellings consistently appear.'⁷² They attribute the survival of the genre to 'the power of story and the attraction many young readers feel towards strange alterities.'⁷³ The interplay between the familiarity and foreignness of the mythic landscape will be further explored in Chapter Five.

⁶⁷ Maurice Saxby, *Books in the Life of a Child: Bridges to Literature and Learning* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1997).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p.150

⁶⁹ Stephens and McCallum. p.10

⁷⁰ Seth Lerer, *Children's Literature: A Reader's History, from Aesop to Harry Potter* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008). p.19

⁷¹ Wheatley.

⁷² Stephens and McCallum. p.62-3

⁷³ *Ibid.* p.62

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In 1996 Maria Nikolajeva wrote that '[m]etafiction in children's novels has not yet been studied thoroughly.'⁷⁴ In the two decades since the publication of *Children's Literature Comes of Age*, the subject has been the focus of significant critical attention. Peter Hunt identifies self-referentiality as a feature of the texts when he states that '[c]hildren's books centre on narrative; in a sense they are *about* narrative.'⁷⁵

A number of scholars have recognised that contemporary retellings of myth regularly contain postmodern features. Julie Sanders locates Ovid's retellings of myth as an antecedent of 'the experimental and metafictional aspects of much modern and postmodern writing.'⁷⁶ These kinds of stories, Maurice Saxby believes, 'can be confronting but they are also often exciting and challenging because they question convention and overturn expectations.'⁷⁷ Other critics have discovered myth itself, and its transmission over time, to be a postmodern phenomenon. 'The story of Greek myth's reception...is characterised by its collagist fragmentation rather than a straightforward or continuous narrative' writes Sarah Annes Brown.⁷⁸ James Porter considers that 'myths rewrote themselves, and really just are this rewriting.'⁷⁹ Porter gives the myths their own agency, as if they are in control of their own dissemination.

Several critics have concentrated on feminist retellings of classical myth. In *Monuments and Maidens*, Marina Warner examines the Pandora myth, proposing that the act of rewriting the story can be a way of recuperating its feminist message.⁸⁰ For Diane Purkiss, there is no such thing as a clean retelling. Yet she recognises that the rewriting of myth 'can extend to complex engagements with the

⁷⁴ Fludernik. p.192

⁷⁵ Hunt. p.118

⁷⁶ Sanders. p.64

⁷⁷ Saxby. p.53

⁷⁸ Sarah Annes Brown, "Hail, Muse! Et Cetera: Greek Myth in English and American Literature," in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Mythology*, ed. Roger D. Woodard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). p.440-1

⁷⁹ James I. Porter, "'Reception Studies: Future Prospects'," in *A Companion to Classical Receptions*, ed. Lorna Hardwick and Christopher Stary (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008). p.472

⁸⁰ Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985). p.240

very place of myth in literature.’⁸¹ Holly Virginia Blackford has charted the frequent adaptation of the myth of Persephone through children’s literature of the romantic, Victorian and modern eras.⁸² She argues that Persephone ‘became the perfect muse for writers who would focus on the journeys of girls.’⁸³ Her study of a variety of texts including Hoffman’s *Nutcracker*, E.B. White’s *Charlotte’s Webb*, and Neil Gaiman’s *Coraline*, charts the way this archetypal story of maturation is reworked through different contexts: ‘both found and made anew by each listener and teller.’⁸⁴ Blackford’s work is relevant to my reading of Patricia Miles’ *The Gods in Winter* in Chapter Six.⁸⁵

Julie Sanders recognises that ‘myth is continuously evoked, altered, and reworked, across cultures, and across generations.’⁸⁶ Jon Solomon agrees, writing that ‘[a]ncient Greek myths were not written in stone but were flexible, dynamic tales changed and adjusted by every storyteller, songster and poet.’⁸⁷ Versions of the stories produced for today’s children are a vital part of this ongoing mythic tradition, and deserve further critical scrutiny.

Chapter Summary

The structure of this thesis is shaped by three key concepts – *child*, *myth* and *text*. Through the course of nine chapters, this project explores the multiple intersections between these elements. While some of the connections are obvious (such as the text as a concrete manifestation of free-floating myth), others are more unexpected (the child as not only reader but also active participant within the world of myth). This focus on the figure of the child both within myth and text also prompts an investigation of the unique features of children’s literature as a genre. Children’s literature is the only kind of literature to be defined not by the content of the stories, but by its intended readership.⁸⁸ The

⁸¹ Diane Purkiss, "Women's Rewriting of Myth," in *The Feminist Companion to Mythology*, ed. Carolyne Larrington (London: Pandora Press, 1992). p.444

⁸² Holly Virginia Blackford, *The Myth of Persephone in Girls' Fantasy Literature*, ed. Jack Zipes, *Children's Literature and Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 2012).

⁸³ *Ibid.* p.1

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p.220

⁸⁵ Patricia Miles, *The Gods in Winter* (Asheville, NC: Front Street, 1978; 2005).

⁸⁶ Sanders. p.64

⁸⁷ Jon Solomon, *The Ancient World in the Cinema* (Michigan: Yale University Press, 2001). p.117

⁸⁸ Lerer. p.2

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tendency for texts ostensibly written for children to communicate directly with their adult guardians will also be examined.

I will also address the ways in which this trio of concepts figures within the stories themselves. In this I am drawing upon Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty's use of myth as a methodology. Just as she finds that '[t]he stories are the method in this book; there is no other',⁸⁹ I believe that the ways in which the figure of the child, the text, and the idea of myth itself is represented within these retellings provides a framework for comprehending the significance of these stories.

Part One: Child

Children are the not only the inheritors of the mythological tradition, but important players within the stories.

Chapter One: Telling Tales

Retelling myths to modern children is an ideologically loaded project, one which perpetuates traditional and long held beliefs

There is a widespread and long standing belief that it is important for children to be introduced to the stories of classical mythology. Children are thought to have a particular affinity with myth, a special connection that is illustrated through stories which represent children as wiser than adults. The stories play an important socialising role, modelling desirable (and undesirable) behaviour. Many retellings, particularly those aimed at the very young, utilise the form of the cautionary tale to convey the relevance of their teachings for contemporary readers. In addition, the myths are frequently upheld as a means of initiating the next generation into the Western cultural tradition. They provide part of a vocabulary with which to comprehend Western art, literature and other elements of culture.

This Chapter considers the history of these agendas from antiquity to the present, drawing upon ancient commentary on the telling of myth to children as well as paratextual detail from the texts themselves. It argues that contemporary retellings of the myths are increasingly self-conscious and self-reflexive, turning the tradition back upon itself.

⁸⁹ O'Flaherty. p.2

Chapter Two: Child and Adult

Myth enables children to make sense of the world and their experience of it

This Chapter draws upon psychoanalytic readings of myth and fairy tale which contend that children benefit from exposure to stories with themes which are at times dark, confronting and frightening. Encountering these elements within the contained world of story allows children to feel safe while gaining important insights relevant to their own lives.

I will argue that the numerous myths that feature the relationship between parent and child, including the stories of the heroes Theseus, Perseus and Icarus, allow children to make sense of their own family relationships. This Chapter undertakes a psychoanalytic reading of these myths, drawing upon contemporary retellings including Alan Gibbon's *Shadow of the Minotaur*, Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* and Paul Zindel's *Harry and Hortense at Hormone High*.⁹⁰ It argues that the way in which the young Theseus strives to follow in his father's footsteps, only to end up 'inadvertently' causing his death and assuming his role as king, can be read as a means of justifying the tensions within a line of succession. Perseus forms a symbiotic connection with his mother within the box (a space in which stories are told), and can be connected to his subsequent encounter with the monster Medusa. Icarus is a more problematic figure for identification, but the story of his flight and fall nevertheless can be read as an important symbol for the tumultuous experience of being a teenager.

Chapter Three: Writing Children In

Children are not only the main audience for myth, but have in addition become players within mythological narratives

In a reflection of their role as a major audience for myth, retellings place added emphasis on children within the narratives, furnishing them with a part to play and a voice with which to speak. In *Goddess of Yesterday*, Caroline Cooney asserts that 'children matter', a claim which I argue has significance not only for the immediate narrative, but also for the increasingly prominent role played by children within the mythological tradition.

⁹⁰ Alan Gibbons, *Shadow of the Minotaur* (London: Orion Books, 2000); Riordan; Zindel.

This insertion of the figure of the child into the world of myth, and the vicarious pleasure young readers derive from this, can be seen as an extension or a related project to that undertaken by feminist storytellers (such as Marion Zimmer Bradley, Margaret Atwood and Kerry Greenwood) who have rewritten the Greek myths from a female perspective. Much like the figure of the ancient woman, in myth the child remains a largely invisible figure, and I argue that a number of works, particularly those retelling the story of the Trojan War, seek to redress their absence.

Part Two: Myth

The world of myth is an immediately recognisable place, a setting in which contemporary authors can perform their own stories.

Chapter Four: Reworking Troy

Texts revel in the freedom to rework and invent the details of the story of the Trojan War, but are nevertheless limited by the narrative framework established in the ancient sources

This Chapter concentrates on the ways in which the traditional stories of the Trojan myth have been retold, reworked and rewritten. As Jack Zipes has noted, '[t]he tendency is to break, shift, debunk, or rearrange the traditional motifs to liberate the reader from the contrived and programmed mode of literary reception.'⁹¹ The ancient tradition provides a structure that is at once fixed and flexible, enabling modern authors to draw upon the ancient traditions in fashioning their own stories.

Many narrative elements are open to creative interpretation. The vastly different ways in which Helen is characterised is a testament to the tradition's flexibility. Yet at the same time, some events and details are fixed and immutable – Paris will always award the apple to the goddess Aphrodite, Achilles will always die, and Troy will always fall. This Chapter argues that the Troy story is a frame within which contemporary storytellers can weave their own narratives, and comment on what they have created.

⁹¹ Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization* (New York: Routledge, 1983). p.180

Chapter Five: Setting the Scene

Texts flesh out the world of myth as a vibrant, authentic place, yet its artifice continues to be exposed

This Chapter explores the ways in which the mythic setting is represented, both in visual terms and via descriptive language. Even without explicit signposting, the world of myth is instantly recognisable. Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope, a union of time and space, is employed as a model for this analysis. The mythological chronotope shares elements with Bakhtin's idea of the medieval chronotope, but is also characterised by a performative quality.⁹² I will argue that the mythological setting is constructed out of a range of simple props (columns, vine leaves, particular kinds of trees) and costumes (togas, sandals, laurel wreaths). Some texts confront the notion of myth as a kind of performance directly (when modern schoolchildren prepare to stage their own 'Greek myth play' in Scieszka's *It's All Greek to Me* and Simon's *Helping Hercules*).⁹³

Close scrutiny will be given to the inclusion of genuine ancient artifacts (such as temples, pottery and even natural vistas) within some illustrations. The appearance of such 'authentic' elements within a plainly fictional setting casts doubt over their status. Such details serve at once to heighten and undermine the legitimacy of the setting. While they may go unnoticed by many readers, they clearly demonstrate that authors and illustrators remain mindful of the legacy of the ancient world, and are at pains to secure their place in the tradition.

The world of myth is not the Ancient Greece of any definitive historical era, but rather a kind of pastiche of the most familiar, appealing and iconic elements of various periods from pre-history through to late antiquity. I argue that the mythic setting can be understood as a dialogic site in which diverse elements are brought together to construct an entirely imaginary, yet utterly convincing, vision of the past.

Chapter Six: Past and Present

Many texts attempt to highlight myth's contemporary relevance by illustrating the close connection between the past and present

⁹² M.M. Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

⁹³ Scieszka; Simon.

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This Chapter addresses two distinct story patterns within modern retellings of myth: stories in which characters from the contemporary world travel through time back into the world of myth, and stories in which ancient mythological characters (most often the gods) have survived into the contemporary era. These narratives raise questions about the sanctity of myth (when modern characters interfere or influence events that have already happened) and its cyclical nature (in Patricia Miles' *Gods in Winter*, the goddess Demeter searches for her abducted daughter in the English countryside).⁹⁴

The notion of nostalgia, and the impossibility of locating the definitive source of an idea, is relevant to this part of the study.⁹⁵ Like other varieties of traditional tales, myths have no ultimate source, only manifestations within texts. The widespread longing to enter into myth, to come into contact with its characters, and even participate in its events (desires that are played out in the time travel texts), are symptoms of this kind of nostalgia.

Part Three: Text

Many myths are self-conscious about the ways in which stories are made, and made into books.

Chapter Seven: Packaging and Publishing

The book is a container for myth

In comparison with other forms of traditional literature rewritten for children, particularly fairy tales, retellings of classical myth have relatively limited renown and status. Yet scores of versions of these stories have been produced during the last few decades. In this Chapter I trace the presentation of the cover of Roger Lancelyn Green's *Tales of the Greek Heroes*, arguing that the changing design of this text over the course of six decades reveals the refashioning of myth for successive generations of young readers.

This Chapter addresses the politics of the textual presentation, publication conditions, and marketing of such works, giving insight into their ambiguous status as simultaneous products of high and low

⁹⁴ Miles.

⁹⁵ While the modern concept of nostalgia can be traced to the mid-seventeenth century, it is worth remembering that its origins lie in Homer's *Odyssey*. For a theoretical examination of the concept, see Dennis Walder, *Postcolonial Nostalgias: Writing, Representation and Memory* (New York and London: Routledge, 2012).

culture. While some picture books are beautifully presented with appealing illustrations and glossy paper, many of the texts for older readers are printed on poor quality paper and have minimal visual appeal. Despite their grand claims of tapping into the origins of Western culture, they resemble ephemeral, pulp literature. Some publishing houses, such as Orchard Books, are prolific in their production of retellings and it is worthwhile reflecting as to whether their motives are merely pecuniary or invested with a more noble educational purpose. It is also clear that some retellings are seeking to reach a specific target audience; Charlie Carter's *Destroy Troy* (a good example of a text which looks and feels cheap and ugly) is plainly written for early adolescent boys with little interest in reading, aiming to foster an appreciation of literature and an understanding of the story of the Trojan War at the same time.⁹⁶

Chapter Eight: Text and Intertext

Children's literature has reshaped myth into stories that are above all about textuality

The transformation of the oral storytelling tradition into the book-based culture of today marks a significant change in the status and representation of myth. And yet in spite of the new focus on the act of reading myths from a book (a moment which a number of texts, like Rosemary Wells' *Max and Ruby's First Greek Myth*, seek to replicate),⁹⁷ the oral-aural experience is to a large degree retained. Nodelman and Reimer have written that young children 'today are the main audience for oral storytelling by parents and others,'⁹⁸ and O'Flaherty goes even further to suggest that in telling a story to a child out loud, an adult becomes a 'singer of tales.'⁹⁹

This Chapter addresses the use of the book as a symbol within mythic retellings and its implications for the development of the mythic tradition. It argues that intertextuality is an important feature in many recent retellings. It includes an analysis of Nadia Wheatley's short story 'Melting Point', suggesting

⁹⁶ Carter.

⁹⁷ Rosemary Wells, *Max and Ruby's First Greek Myth: Pandora's Box* (New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 1993).

⁹⁸ Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer, *The Pleasures of Children's Literature*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2003). p.304

⁹⁹ O'Flaherty. p. 56

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that the text uses the myth of Icarus to interrogate the relevance and the integration of ancient myth within contemporary life.¹⁰⁰

Chapter Nine: Weaving Words

Weaving is an evocative metaphor for storytelling, and many retellings exploit this connection

This Chapter considers the motif of weaving as a metafictional device signifying the mythmaking and storytelling processes. Roland Barthes has written about the etymological and symbolic origins of weaving terminology, and a number of other theorists have also addressed the relationship between text and textiles.¹⁰¹ The numerous myths in which the crafts of weaving and spinning feature, I argue, privilege these motifs as a means of commenting on, as well as consolidating, the position of a particular retelling within the fabric of the mythological tradition. As Karl Kroeber has proclaimed, 'every story implies other stories.'¹⁰²

This final Chapter draws together the many different threads of this thesis, employing the metaphor of the warp and weft of a tapestry to underscore the connectedness of these retellings of ancient Greek myth.

¹⁰⁰ Wheatley.

¹⁰¹ Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," in *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh (London: Edward Arnold, 1971).

¹⁰² Kroeber. p.71

Chapter One: Telling Tales

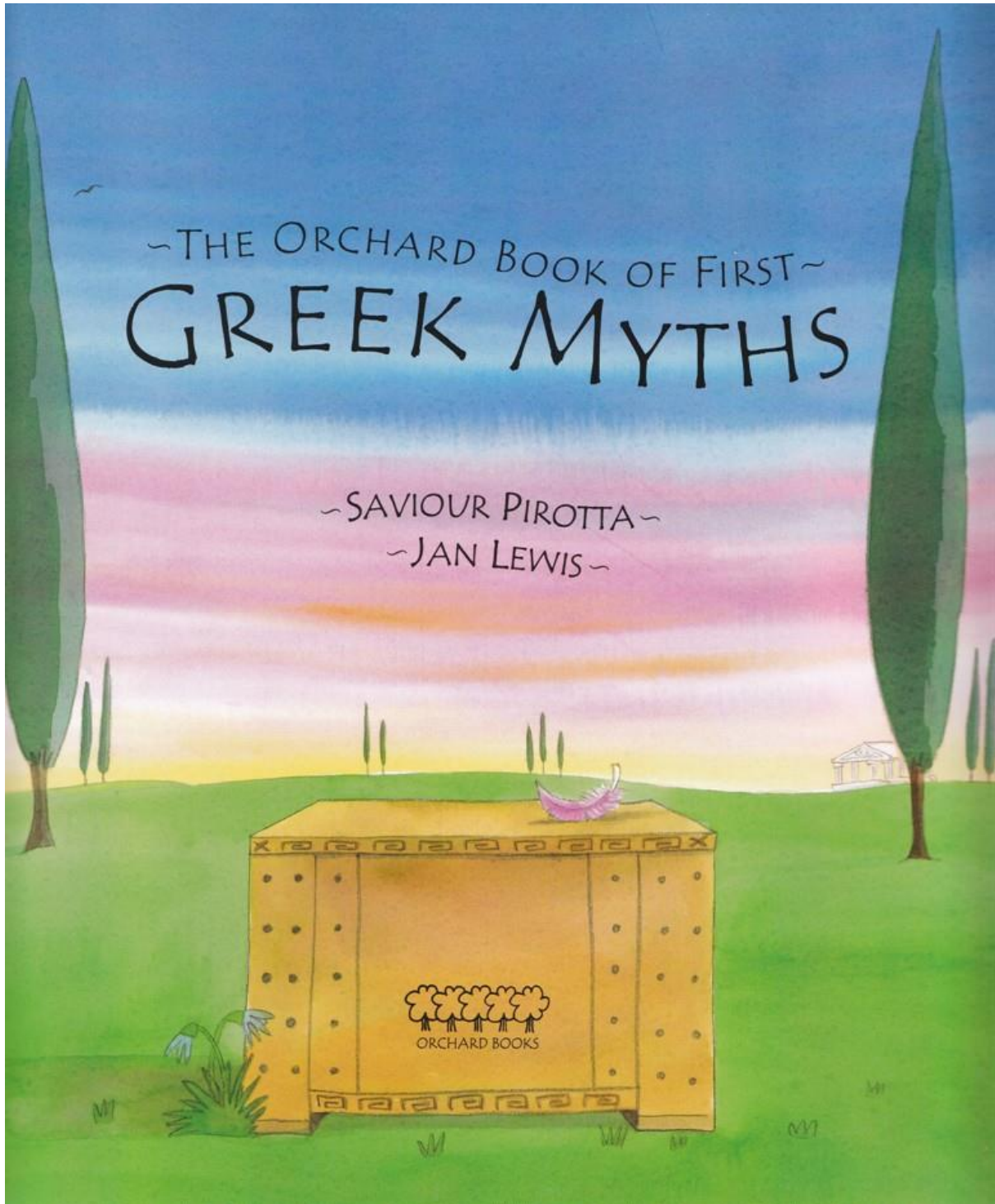


Figure 1: Title page from Saviour Pirotta's *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths* (2003), illustrated by Jan Lewis p.3

Chapter One

A large wooden chest sits in a lush green field, dotted with cypress trees. A dramatic sunrise has streaked the sky yellow, orange and pink. Far off in the distance, the white marble columns and carved pediment of a classical temple can be seen. The box dominates the foreground, its surface inscribed with simple geometric markings. Flowers have grown up around its base, and a small pink feather rests on top.

This image features on the title page of Saviour Pirotta's *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths*, illustrated by Jan Lewis (*Figure 1*).¹ The text's title, together with the author and illustrator's names, are emblazoned across the colourful dawn sky. The name of the book's publisher, Orchard Books, is printed on the side of the chest. The stylised carvings, together with the temple in the distance, suggest an ancient setting. What then might lie within this mysterious box?

The feather on top provides a clue. It references the myth of Icarus, the boy who flew, one of the ten stories to feature within the collection. By implication, this illustration suggests that housed within this sturdy receptacle are the tales contained within this volume, a sample of the rich and varied corpus of Greek mythology. The box resembles a kind of treasure chest, preserving its precious contents safe and sound. From this ancient landscape to the modern day, these stories have been passed down, bequeathed from generation to generation, an heirloom of Western culture. Housed in this box, the Greek myths lie ready and available for a new generation of children to access, just as young readers will open up Pirotta's text to discover the tales within. Both box and book swing open on a kind of hinge to reveal their contents.²

This striking illustration and its implications for the status of ancient myth within modern culture reveals the complexity of the messages at work within what might at first appear to be simple, straightforward texts. In this opening Chapter of this thesis, I will argue that contemporary retellings of ancient myth written for children are underpinned by powerful ideological agendas. While Margery Hourihan has stated that 'no text is innocent: all stories are ideological',³ John Stephens and Robyn McCallum have singled out myth as 'the most ideologically charged area of retold stories because of

¹ Pirotta.

² On the hinge as a linguistic construct, see Derrida. p.66. The symbolic connections between book and box are explored in Chapter Seven.

³ Hourihan. p.4

the complex of significances which may be evoked.⁴ The Chapter will first address the significance of a text positioning itself as a child's first contact with the mythological corpus, and the way in which this is balanced against other texts which rely upon prior knowledge of myth for readers to fully appreciate the subtleties of a new retelling.

I will then turn to consideration of the range of reasons why myths are retold to children today, and examine the ideologies that underpin them. Beyond their function as pure entertainment, the myths have the potential to be framed as stories which socialise young readers by illustrating the consequences of negative behaviour. While the myths have always had a moral dimension, I will argue that some contemporary treatments emphasise these themes at the expense of other aspects of the narrative. Page du Bois regrets the process whereby an 'elaborate mythical narrative, so abundant in themes of significance for understanding the Greeks and ourselves, is reduced to a morali[s]ing parable.'⁵ I will demonstrate that other retellings use the myths to enculturate today's children into the traditions of Western culture, highlighting their influence upon art, literature and language.

My focus will then shift to the implications of retelling these ancient narratives to a young modern audience. The belief that myths are suitable material for children to encounter can be traced back to antiquity, although a number of commentators, both ancient and modern, have questioned the appropriateness of exposing the young to stories featuring violence, rape, infanticide and other confronting themes. In spite of these concerns, the Greek myths maintain a central position within the corpus of traditional literature that is presented to children. Peter Hunt writes of 'a long tradition of myths, legends, folk- and fairy-tales being marketed for children, in defiance of almost all stated standards for the content of children's books.'⁶ Margery Hourihan has written that '[m]ost authorities on children's literature assume that hero tales are unequivocally good for children, as morally and mentally nutritious as apples and wholemeal bread.'⁷ The firmly entrenched notion that the young have a special affinity with myth builds on Romantic ideas of childhood innocence, and a sense that

⁴ Stephens and McCallum. p.88

⁵ Page DuBois, *Trojan Horses: Saving the Classics from Conservatives* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2001). p.13

⁶ Peter Hunt, *Children's Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001). p.5

⁷ Hourihan. p.3

the young can relate to stories engendered when the world itself was in its infancy.⁸ The power of this connection operates in an interesting dynamic with what numerous critics, both ancient and contemporary, have identified as the unsuitability of stories which are not only full of sex and violence, but also feature misogyny, cultural imperialism, and other potentially ‘unrecuperable’ narrative elements.

Finally, this Chapter will propose that the tradition of telling myth is to a large degree self-perpetuating. A key reason that we retell myths to children is because we have always done so, and it seems that the practice is likely to continue in the future. Yet the way in which myths are retold is changing, becoming increasingly self-conscious and self-reflexive. This Chapter launches my investigation of these tendencies.

First Books

The title page illustration of Pirotta’s *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths* reveals how potent ideological messages are at work within the text. The title of the text asserts it to be the ‘first’ treatment of the ancient Greek myths that today’s young children will encounter. The phrase locates Pirotta’s text as one of countless ‘My First Book of...’ titles within the corpus of children’s literature. While the topics of such works are impossibly wide ranging, these texts are linked by the way in which they position themselves as a child’s initial point of contact with previously unfamiliar subject matter. Regardless of whether this is actually the case, the title carries with it the expectation that the original reading of these stories will be a formative experience. It justifies its selection of the ten stories included in the collection at the expense of those left out, as well as the particular emphasis of Pirotta’s retellings. The blurb refers to the collection as ‘the perfect introduction to Greek mythology’, asserting the text’s special status, even among the many versions of these stories that children, with their appetites for myth whetted, may go on to read.⁹ Maurice Saxby has written that ‘we humans live by

⁸ The notion of Greece as the ‘paradigm of the childhood of humanity’ is discussed in Vanda Zajko and Ellen O’Gorman, *Classical Myth and Psychoanalysis: Ancient and Modern Stories of the Self* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2013). p.12

⁹ Chapter Eight addresses the phenomenon in which some retellings rely on previous familiarity with the myths in order for readers to appreciate the humour.

our own stories...[and] the stories we hear and read, especially in childhood, help shape our lives and outlook. They provide us with much of our culture.’¹⁰

Just as it was privileged visually on the side of the wooden box, the name of the publisher in the title of the text highlights the ownership which Orchard Books exerts over the collection. By extension, this group claims credit for the child’s experience of encountering myth for the first time. This publishing house has a commitment to sharing traditional tales with a new audience, and has released other volumes which feature this phrase, including another work by Pirotta, *The Orchard Book of First Ballet Stories*.¹¹ In confirmation of Orchard’s belief in the importance of classical myth as material for children, they are also the publisher of two volumes by the prolific Geraldine McCaughrean, *The Orchard Book of Greek Myths* and *The Orchard Book of Roman Myths*.¹² McCaughrean’s collection of Greek stories, published more than a decade prior to Pirotta’s, includes some but not all of the same myths, features significantly more written text, and attempts to develop a linking narrative between the different tales. The absence of the term ‘first’ in these texts seems a significant omission, although perhaps it merely serves to help distinguish the work of the different authors.

Pirotta’s text is not the only mythological retelling to feature the word ‘first’ within the title. Rosemary Wells’ *Max and Ruby’s First Greek Myth: Pandora’s Box* also promotes itself as an introduction to this narrative.¹³ This title has interesting implications in that it remains ambiguous as to whether it is the child reader who is encountering the myth for the first time, presented by Max and Ruby (akin to Orchard Books’ control over Pirotta’s collection), or whether these characters are themselves the focus of this introductory experience. In this retelling, the Pandora myth is couched within a contemporary frame narrative in which Ruby reads her younger brother Max ‘a story about sneaking and peeking’, so while Max hears the myth for the first time, it appears that Ruby is already familiar with it. I will return to this significant retelling on a number of occasions in the course of this thesis.

¹⁰ Saxby. p.vii

¹¹ Saviour Pirotta, *The Orchard Book of First Ballet Stories* (London: Hachette, 2011).

¹² Geraldine McCaughrean, *The Orchard Book of Greek Myths* (London: Orchard Books, 1992); *The Orchard Book of Roman Myths* (London: Orchard Books, 1999).

¹³ Wells.

One of the most striking aspects of this emphasis on ‘first books’ of Greek myth is the incongruity of these traditional, ancient, endlessly retold stories being presented as if for the first time (or at least for the first time to a new audience). The very notion of a first retelling seems paradoxical. These texts attempt to be formative, but at the same time, they aim to spark an interest in the wider mythological tradition as a whole. As this thesis will go on to show, many of them – deliberately or otherwise – reference other versions of the same story. They seek to be but the first of many books children will read on the subject of Greek myth. In this way a connection is established between these foundational picture books and the more extended retellings of the young adult genre.

The profound influence that a first reading can have is illustrated by my own initial encounter with Greek myth via the work of Roger Lancelyn Green, in *Tales of the Greek Heroes* and *The Tale of Troy*.¹⁴ The cadence of Green’s retellings, and particularly the way he developed an overarching narrative connecting the events of Zeus’ early reign with the Trojan War, had a powerful and lasting effect on me. When I was introduced to the ancient, ‘original’ sources for these stories in high school and at university, Green’s versions still loomed large in my mind and at times it was a real challenge to overcome the notion that Green’s versions were somehow more legitimate than other treatments of the same myths, precisely because they were my initial point of contact with the mythic tradition.¹⁵

While texts such as Pirotta’s assert their important role as a child’s first point of contact with the mythic corpus, others in the corpus rely upon prior knowledge in order for readers to fully appreciate the subtleties, and often the humour, of a new retelling. Satisfaction is derived from recognising how a version of a text changes an established mythic narrative or character.¹⁶ In Marie Phillips’ *Gods Behaving Badly*, the Olympian gods are represented eking out a living in a dilapidated share house in London’s suburbs in the present period.¹⁷ Without an established conception of the life of the gods on Mount Olympus, such a radical revision would not make much sense, nor would its reversals be so entertaining. However, as Wilkie points out, we cannot know what children already know. ‘Children’s

¹⁴ Green, *Tales of the Greek Heroes; The Tale of Troy*.

¹⁵ Herbert Kohl comments on how the experience of rereading scenes much loved as a child reveals new significance, and can even be disturbing for an adult reader. Herbert Kohl, *Should We Burn Babar? Essays on Children's Literature and the Power of Stories* (New York: The New Press, 1995). p.11-2

¹⁶ ‘Reading becomes more rewarding if the reader is familiar with mythical intertexts’ believes Nikolajeva. p.156

¹⁷ Phillips.

intertextual experience is peculiarly achronological, so the question about what sense children make of a text when the intertextual experience cannot be assumed, is important.¹⁸

To Entertain and Edify

While pinning down the specifics of a reader's response to a text is very difficult, the intentions of an author are often more transparent. Bruno Bettelheim has stated that the main function of most children's literature 'attempts to entertain or inform, or both.'¹⁹ Yet this blunt comment fails to acknowledge the significance contemporary authors confer on the power of stories dating back millennia. According to Catherine Storr, they 'must supply some very basic need.'²⁰ In the multicultural anthology *The Great Deeds of Superheroes*, Maurice Saxby waxes lyrical about the archetypal, universal power of myth, declaring that '[t]he stories in this book are among the oldest, most exciting and most powerful in the world.'²¹ He writes that he selected the stories on account of their 'timeless, multicultural and...universal appeal...'²² The Ancient Greek section, featuring the myths of Perseus, Heracles, Theseus, Jason and Odysseus (implicitly privileged by being placed first within the text), is followed by tales from Sumeria and Babylon, Old Scandinavia, the Old Testament, Old England, and Medieval France and Spain. These tales, Saxby continues, are 'among the most action-packed, the most dramatic, the most overwhelming and the most awe-inspiring that the world has ever produced.'²³

Saxby's claims are uniquely superlative, but many other texts feature similarly strong messages within their introductions, epilogues, or other paratextual material.²⁴ On the book jacket sleeve Kate Hovey's

¹⁸ Christine Wilkie, "Reading Texts: Intertextuality," in *Understanding Children's Literature*, ed. Peter Hunt (London and New York: Routledge, 1999). p.133

¹⁹ He was staunch in his insistence that children should never have the deeper psychological meaning of the tales revealed to them. Bettelheim. p.4

²⁰ Catherine Storr, "Why Folk Tales and Fairy Stories Live Forever," in *Suitable for Children? Controversies in Children's Literature*, ed. Nicholas Tucker (Edinburgh: Sussex University Press, 1978). p.65

²¹ Maurice Saxby, *The Great Deeds of the Superheroes* (Newtown, NSW: Millennium, 1989). p.6

²² Ibid. p.7 Saxby's effusiveness is a classic example of what John White categorises as the 'plethora of general statements about the survival, revival and creation of myth.' John J. White, *Mythology in the Modern Novel: A Study of Precognitive Techniques* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971). p.3

²³ Saxby, *The Great Deeds of the Superheroes*. p.13

²⁴ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). p.4-5. According to Michael Cadden, paratextual material seeks to justify why the book exists and why the reader might want to read it. Cadden. p.viii

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Arachne Speaks is celebrated as ‘a timeless rendering of the ancient struggle between the headstrong Arachne and the powerful Athena’.²⁵ The claim seems to be directed at adults who manage and influence the child’s contact with the text. Michael Cadden has pointed out that ‘[s]o often in children’s literature the Introduction is pitched specifically to one or many adult audiences.’²⁶

In *The Orchard Book of Greek Myths*, Geraldine McCaughrean uses her introduction to confront the matter of telling myths to children directly. She asks:

So why, when we no longer believe there are gods living at the top of Mount Olympus are we still telling their stories? Because they are full of the things that fascinate anyone, in any country, at any time. There are adventures and jokes, fables and fairy stories, thrills and happy endings. In short, the Greek myths are just too good to forget.²⁷

McCaughrean’s words find an echo in James Reeves’ *The Trojan Horse*.²⁸ The narrator Ilias, who survived the fall of Troy as a boy of ten, begins by saying ‘[t]he story I now tell you is one I cannot forget.’ There is an implication here that readers will find it just as memorable. The invention of a young child to act as narrator of this renowned mythic saga reflects attention back upon the young readers of this text, and in doing so, places emphasis upon the way they respond – and in particular, remember – this story. The twinning of the child in the story and the child as reader can also be identified within other texts. In *Fantastic Creatures from Greek Myths*, Pat Posner employs the mythic character Jason as a paradigm for all readers, everywhere. ‘All children love stories, and the story Jason loved most of all was the one about the day he was born.’²⁹

Many retellings are explicit in instructing young readers as to how they ought to behave, most often through negative example. In the Preface to *As Good as Gold: Stories of Values from around the World*, a cross-cultural collection which includes a retelling of the story of King Midas and the Golden Touch, Barbara Baumgartner writes that ‘[m]uch of our growing up involves learning from our own mistakes and adventures. Stories give us vicarious experiences from which we can learn even more.’³⁰ The

²⁵ Kate Hovey, *Arachne Speaks* (New York: McElderry, 2000).

²⁶ Cadden. p.ix

²⁷ McCaughrean, *The Orchard Book of Greek Myths*. p.7

²⁸ James Reeves, *The Trojan Horse* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1968).

²⁹ Pat Posner, *Fantastic Creatures from Greek Myth* (London: Brimax; Octopus Publishing Group, 2003). p.26

³⁰ Barbara Baumgartner, *Good as Gold: Stories of Value from around the World* (New York: DK Publishing, 1998).

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strangeness of privileging the maturation process with a capital letter aside, her comment highlights the emphasis many texts place on the didactic potential of myth.

In Pirotta's *Orchard Book of First Greek Myths*, the lessons have been simplified and tailored to reach a young contemporary audience. His version of the Midas story illustrates the folly of greed, concluding with Midas hugging his daughter and declaring that '[s]ome things are much more precious than gold.'³¹ Arachne's tale illustrates the devastating consequences of pride and boastfulness, with the closing words of the narrative clarifying her mistake: 'Poor Arachne. How she wished she hadn't been so rude to the great goddess Athena.'³² This sentence construction, with its emphasis on pity and regret, is repeated in the conclusion to other tales.

The importance of heeding the instructions of one's parents' is repeatedly emphasised. As he is sailing home to Athens after vanquishing the Minotaur, Theseus is so busy celebrating with his friends that he neglects to honour the promise he made to his father to signal his victory by displaying white sails on his ship. When he catches sight of the ordinary sails and assumes his son to be dead, Aegeus commits suicide by hurling himself from a cliff into the ocean. As Theseus is being crowned king in his father's place, full of regret he assures his subjects that he will 'never do anything rash or foolhardy again'.³³ Much like Theseus, Icarus fails to listen to his father's instructions and fly a middle course, a piece of advice which has often been regarded as having relevance to life in more general terms. Though it is Icarus who loses his life, his disobedience has an additional result, for the text holds him directly responsible for the fact that his father lives 'alone in sadness for the rest of his life'.³⁴ By extension, these outcomes foster a child's obedience to their parents.

³¹ Pirotta, *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths*. p.26

³² Ibid. p.34

³³ Ibid. p.42

³⁴ Ibid. p.60

Pirotta's retelling of the myth of Pandora, the opening story of the ten in the collection, is especially interesting in terms of its connection with the illustration of the box that appears on the title page. Immediately following the table of contents is another representation of a sturdy wooden chest, once again resting in a grassy field (*Figure 2*). This box too is simply decorated with geometric spirals, crosses and dots, although this time, it is also fitted with a heavy lock. Around the story's title, 'The Secret Chest', the gloomy sky teems with a swarm of grey creatures with wings, horns, and forked tails. These, it is clear, are the creatures which Pandora releases from the box, described as the 'thousands and thousands of dark shadows',³⁵ which have been sent by the

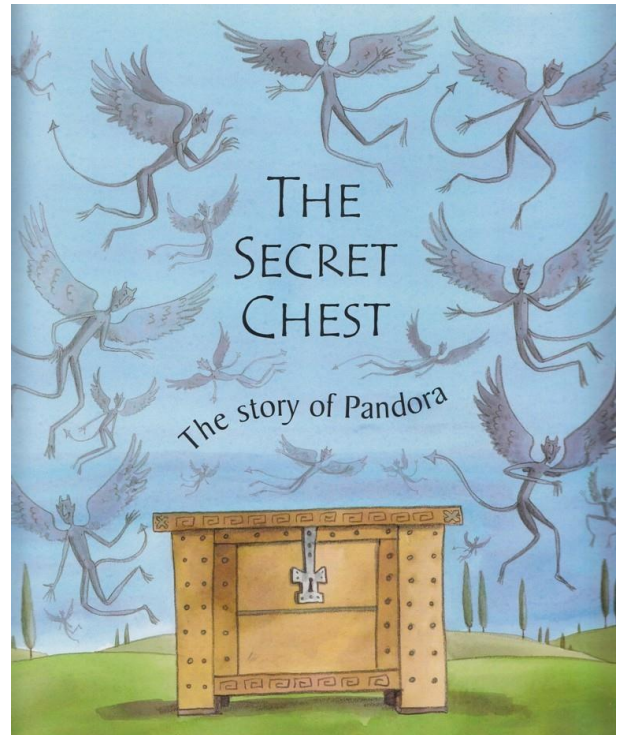


Figure 2: Saviour Pirotta's *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths* (2003), illustrated by Jan Lewis, p.7

Gods 'to punish people for the things they had done wrong'.³⁶ This framing of this box's contents in such intensely moral terms fits the tone of Pirotta's work, but the curious similarities in the representation of Pandora's Box and the chest of stories on the title page raises interesting questions about their relationship.

It seems logical enough that the creators of this text would seek to link their stories, with their simple moral messages, with Hope, which, in the closing words of this retelling, 'is still flying around the world, bringing help to those who need it.'³⁷ Hope's widespread dissemination echoes that of mythology, which, even in the contemporary age, is everywhere. But what then of the other forces contained within the box? Would Pirotta and Lewis really want to associate their stories with the woes of the world?

³⁵ Ibid. p.13

³⁶ Ibid. p.16

³⁷ Ibid.

I can offer two possible explanations for this troubling association. The first is that myth does indeed have a dark side. So many mythic narratives are full of sex, violence, rape, incest, infanticide and misogyny – all manner of confronting themes that in any other context, probably wouldn't be considered appropriate for young children. Even so, in the contemporary age children have become one of the primary audiences – if not *the* primary audience – for classical mythology. Some of the most graphic, 'adult' themes are of course suppressed, but elements invariably remain – it is difficult, for example, to tell the story of Icarus without him falling to his death. I propose that these two illustrations are a way of acknowledging myth's darker elements in a way that the text itself isn't able to.

My second proposal is that what resides in Pandora's box is not necessarily evil, but that the tradition has compelled us to consider it in such terms. In its purest form, what comes out of the box is what makes us human – we hurt each other, we make mistakes, and most importantly, we grow old and die. In a way, these things are precisely what gives life its richness, reminding us that we don't live in some heavenly paradise, but instead, that we are human. This too is a function of myth. In promoting such a message to children, these retellings of the Pandora story enable us to tap into a part of our cultural heritage, as the next part of this discussion will reveal. Perhaps it is for this reason that Pandora's box makes for a fitting symbol for the storytelling tradition. Contained within the chest are the treasures of Western culture.

Cultural Codes

A more subtle motivation prompting the retelling of myth is a belief that the stories are an embodiment of the cultural heritage of the Western world, and that young children derive benefit from being enculturated into such a system. A familiarity with myth provides the vocabulary, tools and codes with which to interpret what Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer refer to as 'the Western cultural repertoire'.³⁸ As Antoinette Brazouski and Mary J. Klatt have stressed, 'there are countless paintings and musical compositions that one cannot fully appreciate without knowledge of the

³⁸ Nodelman and Reimer. p.326 This point was made more than a century ago by Helene Adeline Guerber, who in 1893 wrote that the myths 'have inspired so much of the best thought in English literature that a knowledge of them is often essential to the understanding of what we read.' H.A. Guerber, *The Myths of Greece and Rome: Their Stories, Signification and Origin* (New York: American Book Company, 1893; 1921). p.v

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mythological personages and incidents featured in them'.³⁹ They believe that mythic retellings help to prepare children for subsequent encounters with these characters in art and literature.⁴⁰ In this way, a familiarity with classical mythology furnishes a young person with a key with which to unlock the Western tradition:

It goes without saying that in Western literature there are numerous allusions to Greek and Roman myths. Early exposure to the myths not only frees one from the necessity of consulting footnotes and/or reference books but, more important,...enables a single name or word to evoke a wealth or enriching associations.⁴¹

In *The Orchard Book of Mythical Beasts*, Margaret Mayo frames the story of Aegeus' drowning as a geographical aetiology. The tale concludes that 'in his honour, Theseus decided to call the sea where King Aegeus had drowned the Aegean. And so it has remained. Look on any map and you will find that the wide waters to the east of Athens are still called the Aegean Sea.'⁴² The use of direct address serves to foster the reference with a heightened sense of relevance for the reader, and the confidence with which the imperative phrase 'look on *any* map' is expressed further serves to underscore the extent of this story's significance. Another aetiology is cited in the ending to the tale of Echo and Narcissus in Geraldine McCaughrean's *The Orchard Book of Greek Myths*. 'To this day, the same flower can be found growing on the banks of the ponds, leaning out over the water as if in love with its own reflection. And people call it narcissus, though they have long since forgotten the vain shepherd boy.'⁴³ The notion that the mythological context for the flower's name has been forgotten – and is here being revived – at once serves to privilege the mythic tradition and mourn its loss of recognition.

Antonia Barber's picture book *Apollo and Daphne: Masterpieces of Mythology* is also intensely aetiological, but engages with more complex forms of referencing the classical tradition.⁴⁴ This text is a collection of fifteen myths, including retellings of the myths of Arachne, Icarus, and Midas, as well as a number of less regularly told tales, including stories about Orion, Adonis, and Acis and Galatea. In contrast to the majority of recent texts, which tend to favour Greek sources, Ovid is a major

³⁹ Brazouski and Klatt. p.x

⁴⁰ Ibid. p.89

⁴¹ Ibid. p.vii. On the wider influence of the classics, also see Judith Affleck, "Twilight Classics," in *The Teaching of Classics*, ed. James Morwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). She writes that '[l]earning about the past and living in the present are constantly enriched by familiarity with the classical world.' p.163

⁴² Margaret Mayo, *The Orchard Book of Mythical Birds and Beasts* (London: Orchard Books, 1996). p.84

⁴³ McCaughrean, *The Orchard Book of Greek Myths*. p.25

⁴⁴ Antonia Barber, *Apollo and Daphne: Masterpieces of Mythology* (London: Frances Lincoln, 1998).

influence on Barber's work. Each story in the collection concludes with an explanation for a social, astronomical or botanical phenomenon. Once again, the repeated use of the phrase 'to this day' within each story's conclusion serves to promote a sense of continuity between the mythic past and the contemporary world.

Although Barber does not articulate her intentions explicitly, the book's subtitle, 'Masterpieces of Mythology', indicates a desire to celebrate the literary and artistic highlights of the Western tradition in conjunction. Each story is illustrated by a relevant work of art, with the myth of Europa and the Bull being accompanied by Rembrandt's *The Abduction of Europa*, Apollo and Daphne by Tiepolo's *Apollo Pursuing Daphne*, and Arachne's transformation into a spider by the *Athena and Arachne* of Tintoretto. Paintings by Raphael, Botticelli, and Bruegel feature, alongside several less renowned Renaissance and Pre-Raphaelite artists. In all but one instance, the paintings have been cropped to concentrate attention upon only the most relevant image for the myth. Taking such liberties with renowned works of art has interesting implications not only for their hallowed status, but also for the way in which a reader might subsequently engage with the genuine work.

Though their means of communicating, the message takes many forms. Those who retell the Greek myths are united by their desire to demonstrate the enduring relevance of these stories. By casting the myths as a key with which to unlock the cultural codes of the Western tradition, these texts make a powerful assertion about the stories' currency in past contexts as well as into the future.

Ancient Traditions

Though the practice has burgeoned in the recent decades upon which this thesis concentrates, the retelling of myths to children is not merely a recent phenomenon, and neither is the critical tradition which frames it. Plato provides one of the first analyses of the phenomenon in the final part of Book II of the *Republic*.⁴⁵ His critique of the consequences of telling stories to children seems strikingly contemporary in its understanding, anticipating a number of the key concerns of scholars of modern

⁴⁵ Plato, *Platonis Opera*, trans. John Burnet (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903). 2.376e-383c

children's literature, particularly in terms of the way in which myth should be controlled and monitored.

The text emphasises the formative role that myths play in the education of the young. Socrates declares that *πρῶτον τοῖς παιδίοις μύθους λέγομεν* ('first we tell to our children stories').⁴⁶ This is a crucial stage in development, he continues, when young minds are most easily moulded (*πλάττεται*) and influenced (*ἐνδύεται*).⁴⁷ And as a result, the stories that are told at this seminal stage ought to be placed under strict control.

καὶ ὄν μὲν ἂν καλὸν μῦθον ποιήσωσιν, ἐγκριτέον, ὄν δ' ἂν μή, ἀποκριτέον. τοὺς δ' ἐγκριθέντας πείσομεν τὰς τροφούς τε καὶ μητέρας λέγειν τοῖς παισίν, καὶ πλάττειν τὰς ψυχὰς αὐτῶν τοῖς μύθοις πολὺ μᾶλλον ἢ τὰ σώματα ταῖς χερσίν: ὧν δὲ νῦν λέγουσι τοὺς πολλοὺς ἐκβλητέον.

Thus it seems that first we must supervise the making of stories, and evaluate the ones which seem good, and reject the rest. And we shall persuade the nurses and the mothers to tell to the children the stories we accept, and shape their souls with the stories far rather than their bodies with their hands. But most of the stories they tell today we must reject.⁴⁸

This proclamation identifies mothers and nurses as the leading perpetrators of mythic storytelling. This detail seems significant in light of the key role which parents and guardians have taken on as the performers of myth to the very young in the modern world. Several commentators have noted that the act of a parent reading a mythic story aloud to a child is a contemporary version of an ancient performance by a bard.⁴⁹

Socrates' statement is also significant for the way in which it recognises a corpus of mythic stories, a body of material with a variety of different themes and ideologies. The final comment, that the majority of tales told today must be rejected, foreshadows the words of children's literature critics John Stephens and Robyn McCallum, who are so troubled by the problematic nature of myth that they

⁴⁶ Ibid. 2.377a

⁴⁷ Ibid. 2.377b

⁴⁸ Ibid. 2.377c

⁴⁹ Nodelman and Reimer. p.304; O'Flaherty. p.56

wonder if 'myth may well be unrecuperable as part of children's experience of culture.'⁵⁰ The notion of age-appropriate material is also raised, with the story of Ouranos' castration by his son Kronos being charged with being 'not fit as it is to be lightly repeated to the young and foolish'.⁵¹ Indeed, this is not one of the myths that is regularly retold, on account of its confronting themes. One of the few versions, Menelaos Stephanides' *The Battle of the Titans* describes the act only in symbolic terms. 'He struck his father, wounded him horribly and left him powerless – as powerless to rule the world again as to father other children.'⁵²

Stephens and McCallum find that the dominant metanarratives operating in most myths endorse misogynist, masculinist, elitist and other conservative ideologies. Along with a number of other scholars, they express unease about the principles endorsed within these stories. Lisa Maurice writes that the longstanding tradition of retelling Greek myths to children is 'perhaps rather surprising' considering the 'often far from morally uplifting' messages they contain.⁵³ Plato foreshadows some of their concerns, arguing that a young audience should not be exposed to stories about people who commit horrible crimes, about conflict between the generations, or about 'wars and plots and battles among the gods'.⁵⁴ He believes that children do not have the ability to distinguish between the allegorical and the literal,⁵⁵ and thus should only be exposed to tales that encourage 'the highest excellence of character'.⁵⁶ This final point is especially interesting in light of the blatantly didactic overtones present in so many contemporary retellings, and in particular the trend in which mythic characters play out the consequences of negative behaviour.

⁵⁰ Stephens and McCallum. p.10

⁵¹ Plato. 2.377e

⁵² Menelaos Stephanides, *The Battle of the Titans* (London: Reader's Digest Association). p.10

⁵³ Maurice, "Children, Greece and Rome: Heroes and Eagles." p.1 Herbert Kohl raises related concerns about the *Babar* books, asking 'Should books that represent these antidemocratic sentiments be a major part of our children's earliest repertoire of stories and tales, or should we avoid purchasing them and sharing them with our children?' Kohl. p.4

⁵⁴ Plato. 2.378b-c

⁵⁵ Ada Cohen wonders at Plato's conviction on this issue when discussing the symbolism of ancient toys. She writes that '[t]he objects cannot answer questions such as whether the ancient Greek children who played with a terracotta horse of the Geometric period thought they were pulling a horse, or whether they thought they were pulling the Trojan horse' Ada Cohen, "Childhood between Past and Present," in *Constructions of Childhood in Ancient Greece and Italy*, ed. Ada Cohen and Jeremy B. Rutter (Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 2007). p.11.

⁵⁶ Plato. 2.378d

Special Affinity

Many texts subscribe to the idea that children have a special affinity with myth. This sentimental notion has its origins in the Romantic Period, with the development of the concept of childhood as a distinct stage of life.⁵⁷ Nicholas Tucker has identified a tradition of botanical metaphors in which 'children are compared to growing flowers, opening buds or tender shoots.'⁵⁸ The conception of childhood as a sacred time, and of the innate innocence of the young, remain powerful ideas to this day.⁵⁹

Nathaniel Hawthorne is a key figure in the development of this tradition. Although better known for his works of adult fiction, Hawthorne is credited with producing the first retellings of the Greek myths for children written in English.⁶⁰ *A Wonder Book for Girls and Boys* and *Tanglewood Tales*, published in 1851 and 1853 retrospectively,⁶¹ prefigure Charles Kingsley's *The Heroes* by just a few short years (Kingsley's work was published in 1856), marking the decade as a highly significant period in the tradition of retelling myth to children between antiquity and the present age.⁶² According to Arlin Turner, these texts 'remained steadily in print for the children's market. The report comes down from his time that children loved him, and his children's pieces have the sort of genial tone and mild didacticism to please children.'⁶³

Hawthorne subscribes to the belief, still widespread today, that the young have a particular connection with myth because the stories originate from the time 'when this old world was in its

⁵⁷ Alan Richardson, "Romanticism and the End of Childhood," in *Literature and the Child: Romantic Continuations and Postmodern Contestations*, ed. James Holt McGavran (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999). p.24

⁵⁸ Nicholas Tucker, ed. *Suitable for Children? Controversies in Children's Literature* (Edinburgh: Sussex University Press, 1978). p.16

⁵⁹ 'The idea of the child as innocent continues to influence children's fiction long after mainstream literature has abandoned the Romantic views.' Maria Nikolajeva, *From Mythic to Linear: Time in Children's Literature* (Lanham: Children's Literature Association, 2000). p.4

⁶⁰ Laura Laffrado, *Hawthorne's Literature for Children* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1992). p. 67-8

⁶¹ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *A Wonder Book and Tanglewood Tales for Girls and Boys: Greek Myths for Children* (USA: CreateSpace, 1851 & 1853; 2014).

⁶² Donovan credits Hawthorne and Kingsley, along with Thomas Bullfinch, with making 'the most significant development in the popular knowledge of mythology.' Ellen Butler Donovan, "'Very Capital Reading for Children': Reading and Play in Hawthorne's *Wonder Book for Girls and Boys*," *Children's Literature* 30, no. 1 (2002). p.21

⁶³ Arlin Turner, *Nathaniel Hawthorne* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1961). p.134-5

tender infancy'.⁶⁴ His version of the myth of Pandora is entitled the 'Paradise of Children', and describes an idyllic world in which there are no sorrows, quarrels or pain, where food and flowers grow in abundance, and time itself stands still, for 'everybody was a child'.⁶⁵ This readjustment of the narrative to concentrate on children as the inhabitants of the Golden Age is important, particularly in light of Hawthorne's intended audience. In opening the box and releasing the Troubles – embodied as stinging insects – into the world, Pandora brings this age of eternal childhood to a close. In contrast to the Hesiodic version, where *elpis* remains under the rim of the jar, Hawthorne's Hope flies out into the world. This detail marks an important change in the narrative, for it is one that more recent authors have tended to adopt, although like many of Hawthorne's contributions, they remain unacknowledged. I will return to Hawthorne's treatment of the Pandora myth in Chapter Three, arguing that his transformation of the first woman of Greek mythology into the figure of a child has resulted in the myth being recast as a cautionary tale for young readers.

Hawthorne can also be credited with developing the notion that children connect with myth more closely than their adult counterparts. In his retelling of the myth of Bellerophon, the ultimate tale in *A Wonder Book*, the hero visits the Fountain of Pirene in search of Pegasus.⁶⁶ He questions people of different ages about the whereabouts of the winged horse – a farmer, an old man, a maiden, and a young boy. While the others reject the existence of the creature, the boy is able to give him guidance. This version has had a direct, though unacknowledged, influence on the Bellerophon story featured in Pirotta's *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths*, which again contrasts the ignorant, sceptical adult characters with wise, well-informed children who are intimately connected with the world of myth. Here the juxtaposition between the old and young is articulated even more starkly:

'Pegasus – what's that?' asked one man.
'A flying horse!' said another. 'Are you mad?'
But a small boy told him, 'Every night when the moon is shining brightly, Pegasus lands to drink from a spring in the hills.'
'It's true!' said a small girl. 'He stays on the ground for a few seconds, then he's back up in the air, flapping his enormous wings.'⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Hawthorne. p.45

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid. p.101

⁶⁷ Pirotta, *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths*. p.75

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While the adults deny Pegasus' very existence, the boy and girl know the creature intimately. Such moments exemplify what Warner describes as 'children's intimate connection, above all, to a wonderful, free floating world of the imagination.'⁶⁸ For Lila Melani, children, in contrast to adults, believe 'in the infinite possibilities and fulfilments of life.'⁶⁹

Peter Hunt, in his edited collection *Understanding Children's Literature*, refers to the common trope of depicting children who are 'obviously wiser than the adults they must deal with.'⁷⁰ A similar notion is expressed in James Reeves' *The Trojan Horse*, when Ilias and his younger sister Ida perceive the true purpose of the wooden horse. They can make out the trapdoor, 'though no one paid any heed to it.'⁷¹ These versions of the Pegasus and wooden horse stories have in common the theme of children knowing these equine creatures (and their true purpose), in contrast to the adults around them.⁷²

One of the major transformations that ancient myth has undergone in becoming children's literature is the loss of their original context as part of the ancient Greek belief system.⁷³ In this secular age, the stories have become so firmly shaped as narrative that it is easy to forget their sacred origins. But in casting children as figures who see and know myth more clearly than their adult counterparts, I think that this important aspect of mythology is touched upon. In this way, children help to revive the profound power of mythology.

⁶⁸ Warner, *Six Myths of Our Time: Managing Monsters*. p.37

⁶⁹ Lilia Melani, "A Child's Psyche: Recollections of Fairy Tales, Myths and Romances," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 3, no. 1 (1979). p.14

⁷⁰ Alan Richardson, "Childhood and Romanticism," in *Teaching Children's Literature: Issues, Pedagogy, Resources*, ed. Glenn Edward Sadler (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1992). p.128

⁷¹ Reeves. n.pag.

⁷² Elizabeth Hale examines the ways in which children's encounters with animals brings them into the imaginative realm. Elizabeth Hale, "Reading Animals in Margaret Mahy's Poems, Picture Books, and Stories for Younger Readers," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 39 (2015). p.187

⁷³ 'Myths and folktales have changed and partly lost their original esoteric, sacred meaning.' Nikolajeva, *From Mythic to Linear: Time in Children's Literature*. p.12

Sex and Violence

There has been much debate over the definition of child-appropriate material. Maria Nikolajeva states her position bluntly: 'Most oral folktales are not suitable for children because they often contain violence and child abuse.'⁷⁴ The graphic themes of many myths, from rape and incest to grisly murders, would render them unsuitable for children were it not for their status as traditional tales, which not only provide other forms of moral and cultural edification, but are also somehow exempt from the normal rules of censorship. It is hard to know whether the appeal of myths is in spite of these themes or because of them.

That said, sex tends to be glossed over in most retellings.⁷⁵ In Maurice Saxby's account of the conception of Perseus in *Great Deeds of the Superheroes*, Zeus visits Danae's prison in the form of the infamous shower of gold, 'spoke to her and loved her by moonlight.'⁷⁶ A similarly tacit approach is taken in *Stories from the Stars: Greek Myths of the Zodiac*, where Zeus is described as wanting 'to get to know [Leda] better...In the course of time, Queen Leda produced two eggs.'⁷⁷ Some young adult texts, particularly the work of Adèle Geras, do explore sexual themes in more detail. Several years before publishing *Troy* and *Ithaka*, Geras wrote that:

I believe that children can digest almost any ingredient (death, loss, sex, violence) provided it is properly presented. Some people are forever getting into trouble for dishing out material which adults feel will severely upset the young, but I have not.⁷⁸

Most works do suppress descriptions of violence, although to a lesser extent. In Webb's *The Amazing Adventures of Ulysses*, the violence of Troy's final battle is concealed from view (*Figure 3*).⁷⁹ Cartwright's illustrations show no blood and no dead bodies. The suggestion that the city is under attack is conveyed primarily through the presence of flames and smoke, but these are firmly relegated to the background, and do not appear even to be targeting the visible building structures. The scene is totally dominated by the figure of Odysseus, with the emphasis firmly upon his valour. This is

⁷⁴ *Children's Literature Comes of Age: Towards a New Aesthetic*. p.15

⁷⁵ *From Mythic to Linear: Time in Children's Literature*. p.12

⁷⁶ Saxby, *The Great Deeds of the Superheroes*. p.17

⁷⁷ Juliet Burke Sharman, *Stories from the Stars: Greek Myths from the Zodiac* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1996). p.25

⁷⁸ Adèle Geras, "Cooking the Books," *Children's Literature in Education* 24, no. 1 (March 1993). p.50

⁷⁹ Vivian Webb and Heather Amery, *The Amazing Adventures of Ulysses* (London: EDC Pub, 1989; 2004).

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compounded by the fact that he fights without a helmet in contrast with the two Trojans whose facial features are rendered invisible by their armour. Although it does register the violence implied in the fall of the city, the written text describes the scene in banal, unemotive language:

The Greek soldiers crept quietly into the city while the Trojans were still asleep. When they woke up, the men tried to fight but the Greeks soon killed them all. The Greeks made the Trojan women and children their slaves, stole the treasure and set fire to the city. Ulysses' plan had worked. Helen was rescued and the war was over.⁸⁰

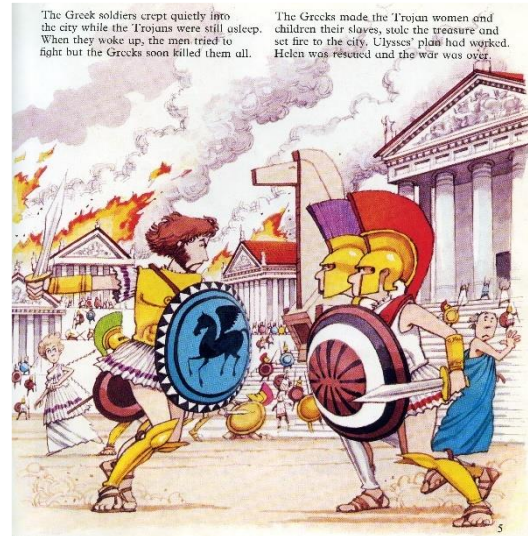


Figure 3: Vivian Webb and Heather Amery's *The Amazing Adventures of Ulysses* (1981) illustrated by Stephen Cartwright, p.5

Troy's absolute destruction is subverted to the overarching agenda of celebrating Odysseus' brilliance in conceiving the wooden horse and executing Helen's rescue. In other treatments, sleep is employed as a euphemism for death. In Pirotta's version in *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths*, there is no reference whatsoever to the violence associated with the fall of a city; the Trojans are drunk and fast asleep. The biggest threat they face comes from 'a dog feeding on the leftovers from the feast'.⁸¹ In this text, the city falls to the Greeks not only through Odysseus' ingenuity, but through the force of sheer numbers.

Some material – the story of Oedipus, Medea killing her children, Philomela and Procne serving Itys to Tereus - seems to go too far. For obvious reasons, myths featuring incest and infanticide are considered unsuitable for a young audience.⁸² But it is interesting to note that these stories do feature within the genre, though with emphasis on other parts of the narrative.⁸³ Oedipus' encounter with the Sphinx is included in Geraldine McCaughrean's multicultural collection *Myths and Legends of the*

⁸⁰ Ibid. n.pag.

⁸¹ Pirotta, *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths*. p.51

⁸² See Lovatt, "Gutting the *Argonautica*? How to Make Jason and the Argonauts Suitable for Children." p.30-5 on the range of ways authors have handled the killing of Medea's brother Apsyrtus.

⁸³ Barbara Weinlich addresses the suppression of certain details of the myths in an effort to protect 'young readers from something that they should not know.' Barbara Weinlich, "The Metanarrative of Picture Books: 'Reading' Greek Myth for (and to) Children," in *The Reception of Ancient Greece in Greek and Roman Literature*, ed. Lisa Maurice (Leiden: Brill, 2015). p.95

World: The Silver Treasure.⁸⁴ Presented in isolation, this story is presented as a typical confrontation between a hero and a monster, and concludes with Oedipus being crowned king of Thebes. The text makes no mention of the events that traditionally follow his victory, but for a reader familiar with the myth of Oedipus, this retelling is ominous for what it does not say.

Conclusion

This Chapter has sought to highlight that the corpus of children's literature retelling the Greek myths is ideologically charged. According to Michael Cadden, 'no literary genre has ever taught us more about a culture and its values than the literature published for a society's children.'⁸⁵ It has argued that these texts are increasingly self-conscious about the act of retelling myth. Contained within text titles and paratextual notations, in the illustrations and within the tales themselves, are powerful messages about the way myths are told, their place within Western culture, and the impact such stories might, and should, have on the children who read them.

I have examined the range of reasons why these stories are still told to children today. In spite of the fact that the classical world no longer exerts such a singular influence over education and culture, the sheer numbers of mythic retellings published for children over the course of the last few decades testifies to the enduring power of these narratives. I propose that to some extent the mythological tradition is self-perpetuating – retellings produce more retellings of myth. The commercial significance of this industry will be explored more fully in Chapter Seven.

According to Maurice Saxby, '[t]he argument as to what is suitable or 'good' for children is an ancient one, and will continue to be argued.'⁸⁶ The comments made by Plato on the practice of telling myths to children are reiterated by some contemporary critics. Commenting on Aesop's fables, Maureen Alden declares that 'children comprehend only the literal meaning of the story',⁸⁷ and miss its relevance to political affairs. This comment troubles me for two reasons – both that Alden assumes

⁸⁴ Geraldine McCaughrean, *The Silver Treasure: Myths and Legends of the World* (New York: McElderry, 1997).

⁸⁵ Cadden. p.xxi

⁸⁶ Saxby, *Books in the Life of a Child: Bridges to Literature and Learning*. p.22

⁸⁷ Maureen Alden, *Homer Beside Himself: Para-Narratives in the Iliad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). p.30

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that children grasp only superficial meaning, and that she is so certain that interpreting a story about frogs and a stork is actually about political affairs rather than some animals. Similarly, Norman Austin has written that

A scholar who undertakes to study myth experiences a curious ambivalence wondering whether the material is directed primarily to children or whether it is too sophisticated for children. The squabbles on Mt Olympus may seem quite infantile, but what of the castration of Ouranos?⁸⁸

This graphic story is one which has been seldom tackled in contemporary treatments. In contrast, others remain perennially popular, particularly those which feature young people as they undergo the process of maturation. In Chapter Two, I will turn to the prolific examples of the relationship between parent and child in mythology, a bond that is powerful yet often fraught, and the implications that this connection has for the way in which adults and children engage with these texts, both together and individually.

⁸⁸ Norman Austin, *Meaning and Being in Myth* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990). p.xii

Chapter Two: Child and Adult

The connections between the young and old tend to be complex and, almost without exception, fraught with tension.¹ The transmission of power from one generation to the next is an uneasy process, and myths about both gods and mortals articulate these conflicts of succession. Retellings of myth produced for contemporary children regularly retell stories about children and their parents. In doing so, it appears that they seek to communicate directly with their young readers, reflecting back their own emotions and experiences. They also seem aware of the specific conditions in which these texts are often performed, read aloud by a parent to a child. Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer have recognised the contemporary echoes of ancient performance traditions, writing that young children ‘today are the main audience for oral storytelling by parents and others,’² and Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty goes even further to suggest that in telling a story to a child out loud, an adult becomes a ‘singer of tales.’³

In this Chapter I seek to explore the psychology of this powerful bond between parent and child as it is represented in these stories. It is clear that myth and psychoanalysis are bound in a relationship of interdependence. Freud believed that children’s behaviour was ‘confirmed’ by myth, while myth could ‘only be understood’ from a psychoanalytic perspective.⁴ While I do not want to go so far as to lay the myths on the therapist’s couch, making the text ‘play the part of the analysand’, as Zajko and O’Gorman put it,⁵ I will examine the symbolism of each story to determine how it both portrays and betrays meaning. These stories, I argue, enable children to make sense of the world and their experience of it.

Freud’s insights into infant development remain a cornerstone of psychoanalytic theory, but the discourse has been expanded into other territory that is particularly relevant to this project. In *The Uses of Enchantment*, Bruno Bettelheim declared that fairy tales and myths are rich in symbolic

¹ Lilia Melani writes ‘Myths repeatedly reflected the relationship between adult and child.’ ‘A Child’s Psyche: recollections of Fairy Tales, Myths and Romances’ in *The Lion and the Unicorn* 3.1 (1979) 22

² Nodelman and Reimer. p.304

³ O’Flaherty. p. 56

⁴ Zajko and O’Gorman. p.3

⁵ Ibid. p.14 Cf. Dundes for another use of this metaphor. Dundes. p.81

content.⁶ According to him these traditional tales chart the process of maturation, allowing children to see the stages of their own development mirrored back at them. Defying critics who believe that the young should be shielded from material which is frightening or violent, Bettelheim was adamant that exposure to dark themes within the contained, remote world of myth provides children with strategies for dealing with issues in real life.⁷ He claimed that answers to the eternal questions: 'What is the world really like? How am I to live my life in it? How can I truly be myself?' are contained within the stories, if children only know how to read them.⁸

Bettelheim believed that myths and fairy tales have 'much in common'.⁹ Though some of his detractors have criticised him for blurring the boundaries between these different forms (among other charges),¹⁰ I agree with his declaration. Moreover, the standard definitions of myth and fairy tale do not always hold when it comes to contemporary retellings. A number of recent versions of myth rewritten for children deliberately render the Greek myths closer to the form of the fairy tale.¹¹ Some even adopt the traditional fairy tale opening, 'once upon a time...'¹² In doing so, these texts emphasise the stories' symbolic meaning that, as Bettelheim believes, helps children to make sense of their own lives, and to normalise the experience of maturation. At the heart of so many stories is the relationship between parent and child, and the tensions it invariably holds as the young seek to assert their individuality and self-determination.

I will concentrate on the symbolic content of the well-known myths of three young men – Perseus, Theseus and Icarus. I am less concerned with their renowned exploits than in their relationships with their parents – Perseus with his mother Danae, Theseus with his father Aegeus, and Icarus with his father Daedalus. Significantly, in each case the young man's other parent remains a shadowy, often absent figure, a detail which serves to intensify the bond with the primary parent. Through a study of

⁶ Bettelheim.

⁷ Ibid. p.7

⁸ Ibid. p.45

⁹ Ibid. p.26

¹⁰ Alan Dundes defines a myth 'as a sacred narrative...set in the remote past', in contrast with a fairy tale, 'set in no particular place or time.' He goes on to claim that Bettelheim confuses myths with legends. Dundes. p.76

¹¹ Nikolajeva distinguishes different forms of 'non-realistic' narratives in Maria Nikolajeva, "Fairy Tale and Fantasy: From Archaic to Postmodern," *Marvels & Tales* 17, no. 1 (2003). She identifies myths as having 'close connections to their bearers', a phrase which I believe highlights not only their links to the ancient past but also to all the storytellers who transmit them, p.138

¹² The phrase is used in Wells.

a range of children's retellings published over the last century and a half, ranging from Charles Kingsley's work in the 1850s to contemporary young adult novels published in the last few years, the ways in which the stories chart the process of maturation will be addressed. I will argue that this corpus of texts emphasises the myths' symbolic meaning in an effort to assist children in making sense of their own lives, normalising the inevitable tensions that arise as the young assert their individuality and ultimately assume the place of their parents. The persistent references to the craft of storytelling that occur throughout these texts will also be examined. These moments of metafiction, I believe, serve to remind readers – both young and old – of their place within the mythic tradition.

Symbiosis in a Box: Perseus

The first part of this Chapter begins with an exploration of the fundamental bond between mother and child. Javanbakht and Whitehead have noted that 'most of the writing on the Perseus myth understandably has focused on the dramatic confrontation with the Gorgon Medusa.'¹³ Naturally, many retellings of the Perseus myth written for children have also concentrated on this famous encounter, exploiting its dramatic tension and, in illustrated versions, the visual possibilities of the scene.¹⁴ However, a number of children's treatments of the myth also devote considerable attention to Perseus' early life. I will concentrate on the way in which his actions are motivated by his relationship with his mother Danae. While psychoanalysis has based its theory upon the relationship between Oedipus and his mother/lover Jocasta,¹⁵ other Greek myths, including the story of Perseus, also play out this dynamic.

I contend that this myth charts the process of separation between mother and child, which begins in a state of symbiosis. The confinement in the wooden chest symbolises the closeness of their bond. Perseus' uniquely close relationship with his mother, and particularly his resistance to her marriage,

¹³ Arash Javanbakht and Clay C Whitehead, "On Perseus," *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis and Dynamic Psychiatry* 34, no. 3 (Fall 2006). p.505

¹⁴ Barbara Weinlich has examined Medusa's depiction in picture books, declaring that the 'ultimate test case for reconstructing traditional gender assumptions...is, and probably always will be, the re-imagination and representation of Medusa.' Weinlich. p.100

¹⁵ Gregory Castle refers to the Oedipus complex as 'the central event in psychoanalysis.' Gregory Castle, *The Blackwell Guide to Literary Theory* (Malden: Blackwell, 2007). p.165

can be read through the lens of Freud's Oedipus complex. It is through the severing of Medusa's head that Perseus achieves the separation from the feminine realm necessary for his maturation.¹⁶

Gender is a critical theme within the myth, with relations between the sexes played out in a number of ways. Danae is trapped between the male bookends of her father and son. It seems significant that the myth makes no mention of what has happened to her own mother. She remains a passive figure in later life, powerless to resist the advances of King Polydectes. Her father, Acrisius, longs for a son, but has only Danae. The myth has often been interpreted as a story about the inescapability of fate. Once he learns of the prophecy that the son of his daughter will kill him, Acrisius does everything he can to avoid this outcome. In the gut wrenching manner of the myths, it is precisely his attempts to avoid his fate that bring his destiny about.¹⁷

Maurice Saxby's description of Danae shut up 'in a tall tower of brass' shares imagery with the fairy tale Rapunzel.¹⁸ Zeus' incursion into the tower in the form of a shower of gold stands out as one of the most memorable elements of the narrative. The mythic corpus is full of stories of Zeus (as well as some of the other gods) assuming alternative forms when 'courting' mortal women. Yet in contrast with his various animal disguises (Leda and the swan, Europa and the bull), Zeus' transformation into a shower of gold seems especially pragmatic; a clever means of gaining access to an inaccessible space. In addition, the shower of gold evokes the specifics of the act of conception (the maiden is penetrated along with the tower) while at the same time remaining suggestive.¹⁹ It functions as a useful euphemism in children's retellings of the story which seek to suppress their sexual content. In his version, Saxby selects careful, romantic language when describing how Zeus 'looked with favour on the lovely girl and one night came to her in a shower of gold. He spoke to her and loved her by moonlight. In time they had a child whom Danae called Perseus.'²⁰ Roger Lancelyn Green is even

¹⁶ Alex Pirani registers the parallels between Danae and Medusa, both pregnant with a god's child. Alex Pirani, *The Absent Father: Crisis and Creativity* (London: Arkana, 1989). p.40

¹⁷ 'The mythmaker recogni[s]ed the limits of patriarchal power and control in the face of the overwhelming force of fate' write Javanbakht and Whitehead. p.517

¹⁸ Saxby, *The Great Deeds of the Superheroes*. p.17

¹⁹ Javanbakht and Whitehead comment on this motif in the context of the 'phallic dynamics resonating throughout the story.' Javanbakht and Whitehead. p.508

²⁰ Saxby, *The Great Deeds of the Superheroes*. p.17

Chapter Two

more modest, merely stating that 'Zeus visited Danae in a shower of golden rain, and spoke with her out of the shining mist, and they had a son called Perseus'.²¹

When Acrisius discovers what has happened, he constructs a second type of prison, a wooden chest which, with mother and child trapped inside, is set adrift on the ocean. He hopes the chest will function as their coffin, yet efface him of direct responsibility for the murder of his family. Yet this wooden box seems invested with other layers of symbolism. In Charles Kingsley's retelling, *The Heroes: Or Greek Fairy Tales for My Children*, Danae passes the time by singing to her child:

So they floated on and on, and the chest danced up and down upon the billows, and the baby slept upon its mother's breast: but the poor mother could not sleep, but watched and wept, and she sang to her baby as they floated; and the song which she sang you shall learn yourselves some day.²²

Although Kingsley remains coy as to the subject of Danae's song, it is my belief that the description suggests that she imparts some of the Greek myths to her baby boy. Perseus might slumber through his mother's performance, but he is nevertheless inculcated into the mythic tradition, including the story of his own genesis. One of the central tenets of this thesis is that such moments of metafiction occur frequently within recent retellings of myth, and it is interesting to find Kingsley, first published in 1856, exhibiting this kind of self-consciousness about his own storytelling. The way in which he speaks directly to his readers, revealing that 'the song which she sang you shall learn yourselves some day', alludes to the future of not only his young audience but also a time in the future of the myth.

In this way, this wooden chest is cast as a container for stories. We have already encountered the box of stories motif in Jan Lewis' illustrations in Saviour Pirotta's *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths*.²³ That image implied that the tales contained within the collection were stored within an ancient box, handed down from one generation to the next. Kingsley's text, in which it is mother and child inside the box, anticipates the performance conditions in which the Greek myths are often told today, with a parent sharing a story or text with their child.

²¹ Green, *Tales of the Greek Heroes*. p.71

²² Charles Kingsley, *The Heroes: Or Greek Fairy Tales for My Children* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1856; 1980). p.9

²³ Pirotta, *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths*.

Huddled close within the confinement of the box, Danae and Perseus exist in a state of symbiosis. Alex Pirani writes that 'she and her baby are one, before and after the birth.'²⁴ The closeness of this connection extends to Perseus' time as an adolescent, when he resists the advances Polydectes makes towards his mother. According to Javanbakht and Whitehead, '[h]is violent opposition to this union reflects his continuing symbiotic and now clearly oedipal relationship with his mother.'²⁵ In Saxby's version, the nasty king provokes Perseus, saying 'I hear that you are too much in the company of your mother and the womenfolk.'²⁶ Perseus' maturation involves the separation from his mother and the sphere of the feminine. His quest to bring back the Gorgon's head involves a series of encounters with monstrous women.²⁷ It is no mistake that the Graeae and the Gorgons are all female. Both Saxby and Green extend this pattern by also having him consult the daughters of Atlas, who instruct him that he also requires Hades' helmet of invisibility.

Javanbakht and Whitehead believe that the narrative's 'patriarchal and adolescent dynamics may still resonate with the modern reader.'²⁸ One of the more recent texts to explore the relationship between Perseus and his mother is Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*.²⁹ This text, along with its sequel novels, cinematic adaptations, and graphic novels, has made a significant contribution to popularising classical mythology for a twenty-first century audience. While the impact of this high-profile text will be addressed further in Chapter Seven, I want to focus here on the ways in which Riordan's text draws upon the bond between Danae and Perseus, but transforms its outcomes.

Like his mythic namesake, Percy's relationship with his mother is uniquely close. 'My mother can make me feel good just by walking into the room' he says.³⁰ Their connection is built on a shared history of hardship since the happy summer when Percy's mother had an affair with the god Poseidon in a summer cabin by the sea.³¹ The close connection between mother and child is contrasted with

²⁴ Pirani. p.19

²⁵ Javanbakht and Whitehead. p.509

²⁶ Saxby, *The Great Deeds of the Superheroes*. p.18

²⁷ Richard Caldwell, *The Origin of the Gods: A Psychoanalytic Study of Greek Theogonic Myth* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). p.45

²⁸ Javanbakht and Whitehead. p.518

²⁹ Riordan.

³⁰ Ibid. p.32-3

³¹ This Perseus is not the son of Zeus: Riordan freely borrows, twists and changes the structure and detail of myth to suit the purposes of his own narrative.

the grotesque figure of Sally's new husband Gabe. Acting as a modern counterpart for Polydectes, he is filthy, gluttonous, and ultimately revealed as physically abusive.³² While the primary focus of the text is on Percy's heroic journey, Riordan also explores Sally's predicament. The text implies that she needs to assert her own selfhood and free herself of the men who seek to control her. Where Danae remains a passive object to be passed from one man to another, the story's conclusion reveals that Sally can achieve liberation.

Percy fails to save his mother from the Minotaur as he enters Camp Halfblood. His guilt over this act of negligence dominates the narrative, and he misunderstands the Pythia's prophecy 'you shall fail to save what matters most' as a reference to her disappearance.³³ The text draws upon the story of Orpheus and Eurydice in depicting Percy's descent to the Underworld, yet complicates the mythic pattern by forcing Percy to choose to save his friends rather than liberating his mother.³⁴ The transferral of this narrative of romantic love into one describing the bond between parent and child is an interesting slippage. Ultimately, Hades returns Percy's mother to him, and at the novel's end, as Percy packs his bags for his return to New York, there is a sense that like the traditional Perseus, Percy has achieved heroic maturity and the bond with his mother is now one of many in his life. In turn, Sally has begun to assert her own independence. When Percy offers to dispatch the abusive Gabe by showing him Medusa's severed head, she tells him, 'If my life is going to mean anything, I have to live it myself. I can't let a god take care of me...or my son. I have to...find the courage on my own.'³⁵ In the end Percy leaves her fate – as well as the head of Medusa – in her own hands. She later writes to Percy that Gabe has vanished. Canny readers are left to interpret the origins of her prize winning, life-size concrete sculpture, entitled *The Poker Player*.

Considered through the lens of psychoanalysis, the myth of Perseus is revealed as a story about a young man's maturation, negotiating the tension between symbiotic and patriarchal forces. Javanbakht and Whitehead see Perseus' heroic exploits as a progressive 'mastery of infantile and pro-symbiotic impulses.'³⁶ But moving beyond the accepted psychoanalytic reading, I am struck by what

³² Riordan. p.348

³³ Ibid. p.141

³⁴ Ibid. p.316

³⁵ Ibid. p.352

³⁶ Javanbakht and Whitehead. p.512

the unusually close bond between Perseus and his mother in the beginning of the myth might say about how parents tell stories to children, and the way in which this detail is noted and embellished by contemporary storytellers. The body of water upon which Perseus and Danae float seems evocative of the sea of the collective subconscious in which the myths ebb and flow. Lilia Melani has compared the way in which children engage with a text to an ocean, 'constantly moving, shallow in places, unplumbably deep in others.'³⁷

Walking in his father's shoes: Theseus

The Theseus myth is a story about a son taking a father's place, first by claiming the symbols of his identity and ultimately by assuming his position on the throne. Most retellings represent Theseus' failure to raise the white sails on his return from Crete as an accident, but this act (in fact a failure to act) accomplishes his accession as king. In this way, I argue, the story normalises the process of generational change, in which the young take over from the old.

The myth is rich in symbolic meaning for psychoanalysts. Readings have tended to concentrate on what is probably the most famous part of the myth – his foray into the labyrinth.³⁸ In one interpretation, the labyrinth signifies the mother's body, the first site of infant exploration. In another reading, the maze is suggestive of the child's undeveloped mental state, with Ariadne as the mother figure who guides Theseus the child into his developing consciousness. In my analysis of the Theseus myth, I read it as a story about a son taking a father's place, first by claiming the symbols of his identity and ultimately by assuming his position on the throne.³⁹

Much like their treatment of the Perseus story, modern retellings of the myth written for children regularly emphasise detail about Theseus' early life, in this case drawing upon Apollodorus (3.16.1 ff.) as an ancient source.⁴⁰ Following this ancient text closely, Maurice Saxby's retelling in *The Great Deeds*

³⁷ Melani. p.14

³⁸ James S. Grotstein, "Klein's Archaic Oedipus Complex and Its Possible Relationship to the Myth of the Labyrinth: Notes on the Origin of Courage," *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 42, no. 4 (1997). p.589

³⁹ There are notable parallels between the figures of Theseus and Oedipus (who encounter each other in Sophocles' play *Oedipus at Colonus*). Both are unwittingly responsible for the deaths of their fathers.

⁴⁰ Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, trans. Robin Hard (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

of Superheroes recounts how Aegeus departs Troezen before his son is born, leaving his sword and sandals buried under a large rock. Though Saxby does not dwell upon the psychological implications of a child growing up without knowing his father, he states that Theseus learned ‘to be a true man from his grandfather’,⁴¹ implying a belief in the importance of masculine role models. Richard Caldwell cites Theseus as an example of a hero who must seek out his true parents in order to attain his manhood.⁴²

Saxby states that ‘Theseus’ childhood was that of a real hero.’⁴³ He casts childhood as a formative period in a young person’s development, and suggests that there exists a standard kind of upbringing experienced by fledgling heroes. This belief in a heroic ideal is elaborated on in his introduction, entitled ‘We All Need Heroes’, in which he writes that ‘[a]lthough each hero is typical of his time in history and his culture there are, in these stories, recurring themes and patterns of behaviour which belong to all ages of history and all cultures.’⁴⁴ In order to demonstrate the common traits shared by Theseus, Perseus, and other heroes from the Classical, Celtic, Norse, and Old Testament traditions, he then presents a table detailing the circumstances of their birth, tasks and trials, strengths and weaknesses, and ultimate death. With its reference to the archetypes of mentors, talismans and the experience of initiation, Saxby’s framework recalls Joseph Campbell’s monomyth pattern. In its attempt to systematically arrange each hero story into common elements and episodes, Saxby also references Lord Raglan’s twenty-two point criteria for the pattern of the heroic life, as outlined in his 1936 text *The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth and Dreams*.⁴⁵ Saxby concludes his introduction by declaring that ‘the characteristics of the hero may vary over the years and from society to society, but the need for great heroes remains with us constantly.’⁴⁶

When he comes of age, Theseus is naturally strong enough to push the rock out of the way and claim the tokens of his birthright. The pushing aside of the boulder to obtain the objects left by his father has the hallmarks of an initiatory task, recalling Arthur extracting Excalibur from the stone. Saxby

⁴¹ Saxby, *The Great Deeds of the Superheroes*. p.38

⁴² Caldwell. p.64

⁴³ Saxby, *The Great Deeds of the Superheroes*. p.38

⁴⁴ Ibid. p.7

⁴⁵ Fitzroy Richard Somerset Raglan, *The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth and Drama* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1936; 1975).

⁴⁶ Saxby, *The Great Deeds of the Superheroes*. p.13

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describes how '[w]ith iron resolve and with muscles rippling, Theseus gathered his strength and rolled away the stone as though it were a marble. This was his initiation into manhood.'⁴⁷

Where Saxby's version revels in the dramatic spectacle of male power, Andrew Lang's version in *Tales of Troy and Greece*, first published in 1907, seems more interested in the difficulties Theseus' mother, Aethra, faces in accepting her son's maturation. Wanting to keep her son with her, she delays telling him the secret of the stone. But as 'day by day he grew more like his father',⁴⁸ Theseus' heroic destiny cannot be forestalled. The gift of the sword symbolises the transmission of masculine power from father to son, embodied in the phallic shaped weapon. Aegeus' early difficulties conceiving children render the sword a more potent symbol of his single success in creating an heir. But in leaving the weapon behind at Troezen for Theseus to claim, Aegeus surrenders this symbol of his manhood. His loss of influence is manifested when he returns to Athens and into the clutches of the witch Medea.

The symbolism of the sandals is less transparent. Like the sword, the shoes represent Theseus' inheritance from his father, and are later read by Aegeus as confirmation of his son's identity. Their size is especially significant. In an echo of the Cinderella story, the shoes must fit correctly before Theseus can set out on his heroic journey. It is not enough to merely be strong enough to push the boulder aside, Theseus must also conform to his father's physical image.

In leaving Troezen, Theseus departs from the maternal sphere of influence. It is implied that his journey to Athens retraces the path Aegeus took, with the son walking literally in his father's shoes. Saxby makes much of Theseus enacting retributive justice upon the monsters he encounters. Sinis the Pinebender is ripped apart while tied to his own trees, Sciron is hurled from the cliff to be fed to his own monstrous pet turtle, and Procrustes is 'made to fit his own bed perfectly.'⁴⁹ This retributive form of justice culminates in the Cretan labyrinth when he wrenches one of the Minotaur's horns out of its socket and drives it into the beast's own throat.

It is interesting to note that quite extreme acts of violence are allowable within these retellings. In addition, many of Theseus' punishments feature a sexual undertone – from the Minotaur's going to

⁴⁷ Ibid. p.38

⁴⁸ Andrew Lang, *Tales of Troy and Greece* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1907; 1995). p.189

⁴⁹ Saxby, *The Great Deeds of the Superheroes*. p.39

Sinis being rent asunder. Procrustes, renowned for measuring his guests to fit in his bed, is himself bedded. Such graphic detail would seem to render them unsuitable for children were it not for their status as traditional tales, which not only provide other forms of moral and cultural edification, but are also somehow exempt from the normal rules of censorship. It is hard to know whether the appeal of myths is in spite of these themes or because of them. Marina Warner has identified similar preoccupations in the work of the Brothers Grimm, declaring 'sex was out and violence was in, and lots of it, especially in the form of gleeful retributive justice.'⁵⁰ Psychoanalysts have argued that children benefit from exposure to such elements, and that encounters via the contained form of traditional tales help them to face difficulties in real life.⁵¹

After successfully vanquishing the Minotaur, Theseus prepares to return to Athens. But he forgets his promise to his father to exchange his ship's ordinary black sails for white, leaving Aegeus to assume his mission has failed and hurl himself to his death on the rocks below. This narrative element is given prominence in many modern retellings of the story. Although Aegeus' death is immutable, retellings cite different reasons for Theseus' failure to raise the sails, with varying attitudes to his culpability. Many texts retain a sympathetic view of Theseus by linking his neglect of the sails with the loss of Ariadne on Naxos. In Andrew Lang's version Ariadne simply falls ill on the voyage and dies, leaving Theseus so grief stricken that he forgets about the sails.⁵² In *Tales of the Greek Heroes*, Roger Lancelyn Green has Ariadne wander off on Naxos to be claimed by Dionysus.⁵³ Saxby's version elaborates this notion by having him dream that Ariadne is destined to marry the god.⁵⁴ As in the other texts, preoccupied by his grief over losing her he fails to change the sails. His adherence to the will of the gods, even at the expense of his own happiness, is used as further evidence of his heroic nature.

Saviour Pirotta's retelling in *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths* features a more damning critique of the hero. In this moralising text, Theseus is cast as a naughty boy who fails to do what his father asked of him. This Theseus abandons Ariadne on Naxos, having 'no intention of marrying' her.⁵⁵ His

⁵⁰ Warner, *Six Myths of Our Time: Managing Monsters*. p.39

⁵¹ Nicholas Tucker has written 'such stories have always shown the darker side of mankind.' Nicholas Tucker, "Introduction: Fairy Stories," in *Suitable for Children? Controversies in Children's Literature*, ed. Nicholas Tucker (London: Sussex University Press, 1976). p.35

⁵² Lang. p.226

⁵³ Green, *Tales of the Greek Heroes*. p.148

⁵⁴ Saxby, *The Great Deeds of the Superheroes*. p.43

⁵⁵ Pirotta, *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths*. p.42

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focus has shifted to his male peer group, and he is so busy celebrating with his friends that he forgets to observe his father's instructions. This text concentrates on the moral implications of this moment, casting Aegeus' death as Theseus' punishment. As he is being crowned king in his father's place, he assures his subjects that he will 'never do anything rash or foolhardy again'.⁵⁶

In psychoanalytic terms, Theseus' absentmindedness has more serious implications. In failing to raise the sails and 'inadvertently' causing his father's death, Theseus in fact enables his accession to the throne. Having already inherited the symbols of his father's military and domestic power (his sword and his sandals), this final act allows him to fully supplant his father's position. As we have seen, many of the modern retellings place emphasis on the way in which Theseus grows up to be like his father in order to take his place. In this way, the myth naturalises the uneasy process of succession.

The tensions inherent in the relationship between Theseus and his father are played out within Alan Gibbons' young adult novel, *Shadow of the Minotaur*.⁵⁷ The text draws upon the Greek mythic corpus in telling a story about a modern family in contemporary England. The text explores the slippery line between myth and reality, interrogating the notion that, 'Stories can be better than real life.'⁵⁸ It plays out our collective longing to enter into the world of myth, the desire to experience the stories first hand, while also revealing the danger of this addictive form of escapism. By linking ancient myth with modern computer games, it engages with the notion of playing myth and playing with myth. Although its position is not always clear or consistent, the text also has interesting things to say about the use and abuse of myth in the modern world, including Gibbons' own creative undertaking.

Phoenix is fourteen years old, the only son of John and Christina Graves. (Their surname could be read as a nod to the renowned scholar of myths, Robert Graves.) His father is a gifted computer programmer, headhunted by a shadowy company to be involved in the development of a radical new computer game. The game features state of the art virtual reality technology that provides a fully immersive sensory experience, enabling players to smell, feel pain, even eat and drink. John has drawn upon the legends told to him by his wife and son, who are passionate about their Greek heritage, in developing storylines about the heroes Perseus and Theseus.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Gibbons.

⁵⁸ Ibid. p.13

Although their relationship is often tense, Phoenix and his father bond through playing the game. Phoenix finds the game highly addictive, an exciting means of escaping the boredom of the sleepy town his father's work has forced the family to move to. Taunted by the school bully, the game also allows him to feel heroic, although his early attempts to face the Minotaur end in disaster. But the virtual reality suits that enable the immersive experience become increasingly difficult to get off, and along with Phoenix's friend Laura and his enemy Steve Adams, father and son find themselves trapped within the game, where Phoenix must re-enact the quests of his much loved heroes in order to escape the machinations of the sinister Gamemaster.

After an upsetting run in with Adams, Phoenix wryly admits to himself he is 'following in the old man's footsteps...Big ideas, but no action'.⁵⁹ The phrase recalls Theseus' journey to Athens in his father's sandals, but refashions the influence as a negative. For Phoenix, it is the act of following Theseus, rather than his father, which gives him confidence. Lonely and marginalised in the real world, Phoenix finds a more assured version of his self within the game.

Ultimately, the myth serves to bring this dysfunctional family unit back together. Having overcome the game by infecting it with a computer virus, Phoenix and his parents undertake a pilgrimage to Greece. There is a sense that the family's experience both with and in myth, however traumatic, has allowed them to gain a better understanding of their own lives and connections, just as Bettelheim imagined.

Flight and Fall: Icarus

In the third part of this Chapter, I will turn to the figure of Icarus, undertaking an examination of the psychological significance of this renowned and often retold myth. Like the other young men addressed here, Icarus has a close relationship with his father, the craftsman Daedalus. In many children's treatments of this story their relationship has been amplified to become the central focus of the retelling, evidence of the child-centric focus that I believe dominates the contemporary

⁵⁹ Ibid. p.29

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representation of mythology.⁶⁰ Though their relationship is not always depicted as harmonious,⁶¹ once again the connection between parent and child is cast as a powerful bond.⁶² I will argue that a number of retellings display a keen interest in the myth's psychology. These texts extend beyond the myth's rendering as a simple moral parable to advocate myth as a potential frame for meaning making, as a way of finding an identity. Significantly, these texts also display a preoccupation with the nature of storytelling and the enduring power of this – and all – stories.

In Chapter One I noted that the story of Icarus has been regularly employed as a negative paradigm. Conventional retellings tend to frame the myth as a cautionary tale; the boy flies, and falls, only too late realising his mistake.⁶³ Significantly, the story's traditional moral – urging the reader to avoid Icarus' fate by plotting a moderate course through life – has been supplemented by an additional message promoting obedience to one's parents. In Saviour Pirotta's version in *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths*, the consequences are as dire for the father as they are for the son. Daedalus is doomed to live 'alone in sadness for the rest of his life...because Icarus had been so foolish!'⁶⁴ In this rendering of the story, it is not simply that Icarus should not have flown too close to the sun, but also that he should have listened to the instructions his father gave him. The myth has been tailored to have specific relevance to the young readers of today, sanctioned by their adult guardians.

As a model for adolescent development, the myth of Icarus is problematised by the simple fact that the boy dies. Unlike Theseus and Perseus, he does not achieve maturation.⁶⁵ As a result, a number of retellings highlight Daedalus' perspective, and focalise the narrative through his experience. In Jane

⁶⁰ Chapter three will address the appearance of children within the world of myth in greater detail.

⁶¹ Although as a non-literary text it falls beyond the scope of this thesis, it is worth noting that Jim Henson's television version Daedalus is represented as embarrassed and frustrated by Icarus' clumsiness. In contrast, his nephew Talos is a skilled apprentice. Jim Henson, "The Storyteller," (HBO, 1988).

⁶² 'The myth dramati[s]es the archetypal – and seemingly unresolvable – tension between son and father.' Richard Hawley, *Beyond the Icarus Factor: Releasing the Free Spirit of Boys* (Rochester, Vermont: Park Street Press, 2008). p.31

⁶³ Hawley refutes this idea, claiming that 'the myth is strangely lacking in power as a cautionary tale.' *ibid.* p.27. However, his study does not engage with contemporary retellings of the myth composed for an audience of children.

⁶⁴ Pirotta, *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths*. p.60

⁶⁵ It is significant that Icarus is not included in Saxby's collection; evidently, he is not one of the 'superheroes'.

Yolen's *Wings* Icarus is depicted as a toddler.⁶⁶ Stephens and McCallum argue that this characterisation effectively relieves him of any responsibility for his actions.⁶⁷ In contrast, Daedalus is represented as a psychologically complex character, motivated by ambition and ultimately undone by excessive pride. Although formatted as a picture book, this text does not shy away from the complexity of this tale. It confronts the themes of arrogance, jealousy, and compulsion, with the illustrations exploring the power dynamics between individuals and the role of the gods in the lives of mortals. The labyrinth is both a literal maze and a metaphor for the twists and turns of Daedalus' life, and his heart. Icarus' death is cast as his punishment for his hubris. The story's introduction suggests that in its various incarnations, 'it is the Greek passion for punishing *hubris* – pride – that remains at the core of the tale.'⁶⁸

In D'Aulaires' compendium the story is framed within the wider mythic context of the tale of Theseus, inviting comparison between the two father-son pairs.⁶⁹ Both Theseus and Icarus fail to heed their father's instructions, with the result that both Aegeus and Icarus fall from a height into the sea. The account of the 'young and foolish' Icarus is recounted only briefly, but the myth's visual power is explored in a full page lithograph (*Figure 4*).⁷⁰ The illustration depicts the gulf between father and son, employing their detachment in space as a precursor to their separation through the finality of death. Both figures are framed within a circular shape, with Daedalus on the upper right balancing Icarus as he falls in the lower left. The feathers on Daedalus' wings are arranged in perfect alignment, conveying the strength and power of his



Figure 4: Ingri and Edgar Parin D'Aulaire's *Book of Greek Myths* (1962) p.155

⁶⁶ Jane Yolen, *Wings* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990; 1997). On the subject of the flexibility of the age of mythic children, see Mark Golden, *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990). p.18

⁶⁷ Stephens and McCallum. p.71

⁶⁸ Yolen. n.pag.

⁶⁹ Ingri D'Aulaire and Edgar Parin D'Aulaire, *D'aulaire's Book of Greek Myths* (New York: Doubleday, 1962).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p.154-5

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craftsmanship. In stark contrast, Icarus' ruined wings provide him with no support, with his feathers merely conveying the speed with which he plummets through the air. This image provides a stark and shocking representation of what really is at the heart of this myth: the death of a child.

Nadia Wheatley's short story 'Melting Point', from the collection *The Night Tolkien Died*, does not shy away from this confronting notion, but instead employs Icarus' flight as a metaphor for the tumultuous experience of being a modern teenager.⁷¹ The modern protagonist, Xenia Hadzithakis, identifies closely with Icarus, but manages to avoid sharing in his fate. Ultimately she reconciles with her grandmother, having gained a greater understanding of the experiences of exile and homesickness through translating Ovid's version of the myth. Like many of the modern texts addressed in this Chapter, Wheatley suggests that Xenia's encounter with the ancient myth enables her maturation. The other implications of this text, particularly for the relevance of classics within an Australian setting, will be further addressed in Chapter Eight.

A similar generic transformation occurs within Paul Zindel's young adult novel *Harry and Hortense at Hormone High*, which draws upon the Icarus myth but relocates it within the setting of an American high school.⁷² But the story defies the narrative expectations established by this genre, so that these elements are merely a backdrop for the 'story about a hero', Jason Rohr.⁷³ Like Wheatley, Zindel is preoccupied with the status of myth in the modern world, but it is less concerned with issues of antiquity's relevance than the ways in which myth makes meaning for individuals, communities, and for narrative itself. In this text the affinity between modern teenager and mythic character is taken to an extreme, when Jason Rohr, a young schizophrenic, becomes convinced that he is the reincarnation of Icarus, returned to save the world.

Jason is troubled by the narcissism, the apathy, and the decadence of modern life, and is certain that the answers to the world's problems lie in a return to the ways of the Ancient Greeks. His evangelical message is ignored by the school's students and staff, with the exception of Harry Hickey and Hortense McCoy, who like Jason, lament the absence of the hero in the modern world. Drawn in

⁷¹ Wheatley.

⁷² Zindel. Peter Hunt identifies 'the school story' as a subgenre of children's literature in Hunt, *Criticism, Theory and Children's Literature*. p.18

⁷³ Zindel. p.21

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by his charisma and the truth of many of his pronouncements, even while troubled by his delusions of divinity, the pair befriend Jason and do their best to support him. As his behaviour becomes increasingly unpredictable, the school arranges for him to be incarcerated in a nearby institution. Harry and Hortense help him to escape, and he remains in hiding as he completes his hang glider, fashioned out of junk yard scraps, powered by a lawnmower engine and, in homage to his mythic counterpart, covered in white feathers. After blowing up the school office and record room, Jason launches the glider off the school roof. His flight is impressive, but he gets tangled in the cables of the Staten Island Bridge and falls into the river. Harry and Hortense are left struggling to make sense of the death of their friend, but ultimately find solace in the legacy he leaves behind.

Zindel is preoccupied with the status of myth in the modern world, and while Jason's identification with the myth is clearly too extreme, it nonetheless provides him with a framework – indeed the only framework – around which to structure his identity. The text offers a harsh critique of modern society and the sources of its power, and suggests that although many of Jason's ideas are barmy, he is right in suggesting that antiquity holds the answers for saving the world.

Harry and Hortense acknowledges the influence of mythology on the fields of psychoanalysis and popular culture through an invocation of Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.⁷⁴ Although the work is not explicitly named, Harry's familiarity with 'books about the paths heroes have to take' immediately calls to mind Campbell's text,⁷⁵ in which he explicates the monomyth pattern:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.⁷⁶

Harry adopts the structure and language of Campbell's monomyth to provide a frame for his retelling of the story of Jason's life and death.⁷⁷ He describes their first encounter with Jason as the Call to

⁷⁴ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (London: Fontana, 1949; 1993).

⁷⁵ Zindel. p.86

⁷⁶ Campbell. p.30

⁷⁷ Stephens and McCallum write that Zindel has 'transformed the significance of the Icarus myth by mapping it precisely on to Joseph Campbell's paradigm for the heroic life.' Stephens and McCallum. p.74

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Adventure,⁷⁸ which they deliberate over whether to refuse.⁷⁹ Jason's eccentric Aunt Mo is cast as the 'little old crone', who supplies 'supernatural aid' in the shape of a car jack which Jason uses to escape from the Sea Vista Sanatorium.⁸⁰ Following Jason's death, Harry is certain that '[t]here's a part missing' and realises it is the boon, 'something the hero wins and brings back so the rest of the world can be better.'⁸¹ The story reaches a satisfying conclusion when Harry and Hortense decide that they can be Jason's boon, committed to pursuing their respective talents, and to heed the Call to Adventure when it comes again. Their vow to 'always remember what he was trying to show us',⁸² suggests that Jason's legacy is to reveal the ways in which myth is integrated into modern life. The use of the archetypal heroic journey as a device to structure narrative is one way in which this is enacted.

Both Wheatley's 'Melting Point' and Zindel's *Harry and Hortense at Hormone High* participate in the reception of the Icarus myth on multiple levels. In a testament to the fluidity of the mythic narrative, the relationship between Icarus and his father is cast in very different ways, as a signifier of intergenerational tension in 'Melting Point' and as a loving, if imaginary, bond in *Harry and Hortense*. Monika Fludernik has noted the way in which 'different narratives focus on quite different aspects of the story',⁸³ but in spite of these distinct interpretations, each text expresses an awareness about the possibilities of alternative ways of reading.

The story of Icarus is deceptive; at first glance it seems no more than a simple moral parable about moderation and balance. Yet complex questions lie below this surface. The image of a boy with wings is a striking and inspiring spectacle, yet does a story about the death of a child have a place in children's literature? Should contemporary characters be encouraged to identify with the characters from myth, or are such associations dangerous? At any rate, it is clear that myth does elicit strong emotional responses, and these retellings, like almost all others, strive to promote the enduring relevance of the mythic corpus. Contemporary authors have employed this narrative to ask, what does myth mean to us today?

⁷⁸ Zindel. p.17

⁷⁹ Ibid. p.60

⁸⁰ Ibid. p.86

⁸¹ Ibid. p.148

⁸² Ibid. p.149

⁸³ Fludernik. p.3

Conclusion

The connection between child and adult resides at the heart of many of the Greek myths. This Chapter has sought to explore the ways in which contemporary retellings of myth for children make use of this dynamic. It has argued that in highlighting the connection between child and adult, these texts turn attention back on to the child reader and their own family relationships, most intensely the adult sitting beside them, reading the story.

Employing psychoanalysis as a lens, I have sought to make sense of the symbolic content of the myths of Perseus, Theseus and Icarus, concentrating on their relationships with their parents as they undertake the journey into mature selfhood. Some texts attempt to weave the inextricable relationship between myth and psychoanalysis into their own retellings. I have argued that modern retellings of these stories promote the message that myth helps one to understand one's self and one's family relationships better. Characters who struggle in the real world find themselves more at home in the world of myth, but it is not always possible to remain in this realm. Ultimately, what they experience there equips them for a successful return to real life.

The Perseus myth explores the separation of mother and child as a young person asserts their own adult identity, particularly in relation to the opposite sex, while the story of Theseus centres on the uneasy transferral of power from one generation to the next. Although he himself fails to achieve maturation, the bond Icarus shares with his father has been employed as a model for identification in a number of contemporary texts. It is clear that many retellings of this narrative struggle with the troubling matter of Icarus' fall. Where other examples of the death of a child are strenuously avoided, it is intriguing that this narrative is so popular within the forum of children's literature. The Chapter which follows will continue to investigate the sanctity of the figure of the child, and the way in which children's literature has found spaces for the young to inhabit the world of mythology.

Chapter Three: Writing Children In

Building on the focus of the previous two Chapters, this Chapter explores the strength of the association between myth and children and seeks to interrogate its foundations. Where Chapter One addressed children as the inheritors of the mythic tradition, however, here I will turn to their role as active participants within the world of myth. I will argue that one of the major ways that rewritings for children have reshaped the mythic tradition is by centring it around the figure of the child. Children, and the institution of childhood more generally, have been written in to myth, and in doing so, the mythic tradition has been reframed around the figure of the child. Naturally this privileging of children and childhood serves as a reflection of the status and preoccupations of the intended audience of these texts, but it has broader implications too. In the final part of this Chapter I will propose that the act of writing children into myth forms part of a wider cultural project that aims to promote the figure of the child.

In Caroline Cooney's *Goddess of Yesterday: A Tale of Troy*, the young girl Anaxandra declares:

It had never really mattered what had happened between Menelaus and Helen. Never really mattered whether Paris had robbed a temple. But children mattered.¹

She comes to realise that she must do everything in her power to protect Pleisthenes, the infant son of Helen and Menelaus, from the machinations of Paris and the hostile Trojans. As the war between the Greeks and the Trojans begins in earnest, she courageously leads the toddler out of Troy via a secret underground tunnel, across the no man's land of the plain, and into the Greek camp, where she delivers Pleisthenes into the care of his loving father. The fact that the tunnel is so narrow that only children could possibly fit through it serves to underscore their special role in the story. Using this invented character as her mouthpiece, Cooney asserts that the way in which the contested events of myth can be cast is less significant than the roles children play within and around myth.

In addition to presaging the story's final climax, Anaxandra's revelation has significance for the way in which myths are told and retold in the contemporary era, particularly to an audience of young readers. While her comment refers explicitly to events within the narrative, it also has relevance for the way

¹ Caroline B. Cooney, *Goddess of Yesterday: A Tale of Troy* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2002; 2009). p.220

the story of the Trojan War is represented throughout its numerous recent retellings, including Cooney's own. The gaps, ambiguity and obliqueness of the ancient sources have left the nature of Helen and Menelaus' relationship and the specifics of Paris' crimes open to interpretation. Cooney's Helen is a cold-blooded monster who exults in her power to make men die for her, while as we shall see in further detail in Chapter Four, in other versions Helen is cast a sympathetic figure, victim of the gods and her own unfortunate circumstances. Based on Homer and other ancient treatments, both of these extreme characterisations, as well as everything in between, are valid.

In her study of historical fiction written for children, Danielle Thaler has claimed that 'the world of history is basically an adult sphere' in which children are rendered invisible.² While it is important not to elide the differences between the distinct genres of historical fiction and mythic stories, Thaler's comment seems equally relevant for the world of Greek myth. Although the mythic corpus includes numerous child characters, their roles are strictly limited. Again and again, children in myth fall victim to the machinations of adults. As the previous Chapter addressed, Icarus tumbles to a watery grave. Elsewhere, Iphigenia is sacrificed to Artemis, Astyanax is tossed from the walls of Troy. Medea and Heracles murder their own children, as does Procne, who then serves up Itys as Tereus' dinner. These children remain remote, distant figures, silent and silenced.

Authors retelling the myths for young children have sought to redress this depiction by enlivening these figures and giving them a voice with which to speak. In this way, they become able to communicate directly with their young readers. While some authors emphasise the childlike or childish qualities of existing mythic personages, others develop new child characters whom they insert into the structure of the traditional narrative. Liberated from the stasis of entries in a dusty mythological dictionary, these children become three dimensional, complex characters with whom contemporary readers can readily identify.

The position held by children as the main audience of mythic tales is reflected back in their role as the active players in myth. Warner notes how heroes 'gradually became younger to invite the young listener's or reader's identification.'³ While the simplicity of the experience of identification demands

² Danielle Thaler, "Fiction Versus History: History's Ghosts," in *The Presence of the Past in Children's Literature*, ed. Ann Lawson Lucas (Westport: Praeger, 2003). p.4

³ Warner, *Six Myths of Our Time: Managing Monsters*. p.38

close scrutiny, Warner has written that it has 'become axiomatic that the child reader enjoys identifying with a child.'⁴ This shift in focus seems to provide young readers with a frame of reference, so that the strange, remote world of myth is rendered familiar by the presence of the child.⁵

While the previous Chapter examined the figure of the young man in myth, this Chapter gives the same attention to the young woman. The first section will focus on Pandora, whom children's literature has transformed from the first woman into the first child. My focus then shifts from the infantilisation of a traditional mythic character to the invention of a new one – Marygold, daughter of King Midas. In the third part of the Chapter, I concentrate on a text which actively explores the role of the child in the mythic tradition, Caroline Cooney's *Goddess of Yesterday*.

Pandora: First Woman Becomes First Child

Since its earliest appearances in the *Theogony* and *Works and Days* of the 8th century BC poet Hesiod, the story of Pandora has been reworked across a wide range of literary and artistic contexts.⁶ Some treatments have exploited the connections with the Genesis story of Eve's role in the fall of mankind,⁷ while others have attempted to recuperate her pre-Hesiodic origins as a powerful earth goddess.⁸ Children's literature has taken the narrative in another direction, transforming Pandora from the world's first woman into its original child. As a result of this change, the myth has regularly been recast as a simple cautionary tale promoting the lesson of obedience.

As Chapter One highlighted, the concentration of the story onto the figure of the child can be traced back to Nathaniel Hawthorne's treatment in *A Wonder Book for Boys and Girls*.⁹ Although they rarely acknowledge his influence, many recent retellings follow Hawthorne in not only depicting an infantilised Pandora, but also in replicating other details of this formative version. I will argue here

⁴ Ibid. p.40

⁵ Bradford writes that '[b]y presenting historical events and characters through the perspective of a young first-person narrator, or by filtering them through the eyes of a focalising character, children's books routinely position readers to align with characters.' Clare Bradford, "Instilling Postcolonial Nostalgias: Ned Kelly Narratives for Children," *Journal of Australian Studies* 36, no. 2 (2012). p.193

⁶ Hesiod, *Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia*, trans. Glenn W. Most (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁷ Cf. John Milton, "Paradise Lost," ed. Peter Weston (London: Penguin Books, 1990). 4.708-19. See Austin. p.79

⁸ See Purkiss. p.444-5

⁹ Hawthorne.

that the treatment of the Pandora myth in children's literature reveals a tendency for classical mythology to be condensed and bowdlerised.

In this section I will also examine the symbolism of the box which Pandora opens. The metafictional significance of this container has already been noted. In the opening of Chapter One, I examined one text's use of Pandora's Box as a symbolic storehouse for the stories of the classical mythology. The previous Chapter returned to this theme when addressing the symbolism of the wooden chest that features in the story of Perseus. Today, Pandora's box is a well-established motif within the Western cultural consciousness, with the phrase firmly fixed within the contemporary vernacular.¹⁰ Yet despite its current renown, there is no ancient evidence substantiating the famous 'box'. In a revealing example of the evolution of the mythic tradition, the original container was a *pithos*, a jar, mistranslated in the 16th century into the Latin *pyxis*, box.¹¹ Much like Pandora's own transformation from woman into girl, this slippage serves to highlight the mutability of the mythic tradition.

As the first person to produce English-language retellings of the Greek myths for children, Nathaniel Hawthorne holds a significant place in the storytelling tradition. His retelling of the Pandora myth, entitled 'the Paradise of Children', reframes the narrative around the figure of the child. Hugo McPherson credits Hawthorne with 'changing the entire emphasis of the myth', though he is critical of the insertion of 'awkward interpretive comments which are neither childlike nor classical in spirit.'¹² The Pandora story is third of the six tales recounted in Hawthorne's first volume of Greek myths, *A Wonder Book for Girls and Boys*, and embedded within an overarching frame narrative set in contemporary New England, in which Eustace Bright, a young Yankee student, entertains the children staying at Tanglewood Manor with stories drawn from the world of classical mythology.¹³ Each tale has relevance to the group's present circumstances; Eustace recounts the story of Pandora when the children are bored while stuck inside during a snowstorm, and explains that it tells of a time before bad weather existed.

¹⁰ Dora Panofsky and Erwin Panofsky, *Pandora's Box: The Changing Aspects of a Mythical Symbol* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956). See also Ellen D. Reeder, *Pandora: Women in Classical Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). She declares that the phrase 'Pandora's box' is 'very much a part of everyday usage,' p.277.

¹¹ Jane E. Harrison, "Pandora's Box," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 20 (1900). p.99-100

¹² Richard D. Hathaway, "Hawthorne and the Paradise of Children," *Western Humanities* 15 (1961). p.39

¹³ Donovan argues that through his use of frame narratives Hawthorne 'encourages his readers to approach the stories with attitudes of play and pleasure rather than sober scholarship.' Donovan. p.24

Acting as Hawthorne's mouthpiece, Eustace Bright is frank about his own inventiveness, declaring his version of the Pandora myth to be 'a story of what nobody but myself ever dreamed of'.¹⁴ This 'Paradise of Children' is an idyllic world in which there are no sorrows, quarrels or pain, where food and flowers grow in abundance, and time itself stands still, where everybody is a child.¹⁵ This readjustment of the narrative to cast children as the inhabitants of the Golden Age is a striking change from Hesiod, particularly in the context of Hawthorne's intended audience. As I highlighted in Chapter One, the story's opening line explicitly connects the temporal setting with the age of the audience¹⁶. In underscoring this parallel, Hawthorne subscribes to a still pervasive notion that children have a special affinity with classical myth because it comes from the time when the world was as young as they are.¹⁷

Hawthorne reconceptualises the relationship between Epimetheus and Pandora as platonic. She is sent to live with him 'as his playfellow and helpmate.'¹⁸ This removal of the sexual aspect of their connection is followed by most, although not all, more recent retellings of the story for young readers.¹⁹ Some, such as Rosemary Wells *Max and Ruby's First Greek Myth: Pandora's Box* and Robert Burleigh's *Pandora*, excise Epimetheus from the story completely, simplifying the narrative by concentrating entirely on the figure of Pandora.²⁰

When Pandora finally gives in to her temptation, Epimetheus is secretly watching, and as a result he is charged almost as guilty as she is – for all his resistance, deep down he too longs to know what the box contains.²¹ The Troubles that are released into the room take the form of insects, horrible flies and mosquitoes, which sting and bite the children. They taint the world with Passions, Cares, Sorrows, Diseases, and Naughtiness, all the nasty things that characterise our existence and serve to distinguish

¹⁴ Hawthorne. p.44

¹⁵ Ibid. p.45

¹⁶ 'Long, long ago, when this old world was in its tender infancy' ibid. p.45

¹⁷ Brazouski and Klatt. p.vii

¹⁸ Hawthorne. p.45

¹⁹ One exception is the version included in Pirotta, *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths.*, in which Epimetheus 'longed for a wife to share his life' until the arrival of Pandora - 'the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.' p.8

²⁰ Wells; Robert Burleigh, *Pandora* (San Diego: Silver Whistle, 2002).

²¹ Hawthorne refers to 'the naughty Pandora, and hardly less naughty Epimetheus' Hawthorne. p.53

it from that inhabited by Epimetheus prior to Pandora's arrival. Most significantly, the Age of Paradise is brought to an end, for '[t]he children, moreover, who before seemed immortal in their childhood, now grew older, day by day, and came soon to be youths and maidens, and men and women by-and-by, and aged people, before they dreamed of such a thing'²²). Hawthorne draws upon the parallels between Pandora and Eve to cast Pandora as the agent of humankind's fall, but with a particular focus on the end of eternal childhood.

But one creature remains trapped inside the box, and after lifting the lid a second time, Pandora and Epimetheus release the figure of Hope, a delightful winged creature, who soothes Epimetheus and Pandora's wounds and renders the Troubles bearable. Unlike Hesiod's *Works and Days*, where *Elpis* remains under the rim of the jar, Hawthorne's Hope flies out into the world. Although this outcome is not all that different, for either way the spirit brings comfort, this detail marks an important change in the narrative, for more recent authors are divided over which tradition they follow.

Although it is subtly expressed, Hawthorne gives his narrative a Christian framework. Pandora and Epimetheus are told that there is 'something very good and beautiful that is to be given you hereafter.'²³ This allusion to the Rapture casts Hope as a religious force, with Hawthorne (through Eustace) admitting that he is secretly glad that Pandora gave in to 'temptation': 'Hope spiritualizes the earth; Hope makes it always new; and, even in the earth's best and brightest aspect, Hope shows it to be only the shadow of an infinite bliss hereafter!'²⁴

While partly religious in nature, this treatise on the power of hope in this world and the next also has other implications. From the Romantic period to the present day, children have been cast as the hope for the future, and Hawthorne's reframing of the Pandora myth as a story about a child – and the end of childhood – seems to draw thematic connections between these concepts. Childhood becomes all the more precious a state precisely because it is no longer a permanent condition.

Although almost never acknowledged, Hawthorne's influence on more recent retellings is widespread. Many texts have followed his lead in depicting Pandora as a child or a childish figure. Sally Grindley's

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid. p.56

²⁴ Ibid.

Pandora and the Mystery Box draws extensively on Hawthorne's text. Hermes is cast as Quicksilver and the contents of the box are in the form of insects. Hawthorne's transformation of Pandora from the original woman into the primordial child is extended by Grindley, who infantilises the entire mortal race. In this text, humans are 'matchstick men', tiny, vulnerable creatures, whom the gods treat as their playthings. In Niles Mistry's illustrations they are made to resemble miniature toys or dolls.

In this text the insect theme is extended to encompass the depiction of Hope, who, in the form of a beautiful blue butterfly, heals the wounds of those who have been stung and flies off into the world, leaving a trail of airborne blue flowers in its wake. In contextualising the story of Pandora's box with Prometheus' creation of mankind, Grindley also draws upon the Hesiodic tradition. It is fairly unusual for the two narratives to be connected in this way; contemporary treatments generally preferring the simplicity of the moral lesson when the Pandora narrative is told in isolation.²⁵

In Rosemary Wells' *Max and Ruby's First Greek Myth: Pandora's Box*, Hawthorne's influence is again evident in the swarm of insects which escape from the box, yet this text radically reinterprets the traditional structure of the myth by framing Pandora's story within a modern day narrative about the anthropomorphised rabbit siblings Max and Ruby. In this story, Ruby is attempting to educate her younger brother Max to respect her privacy and not enter her bedroom without her permission. She attaches an officious note reading 'No! This means you!' to her door but Max persists in seeking out her special jewellery box. Realising that her note has failed to get the message across, Ruby adopts a different strategy.

Ruby made Max sit in her chair.
'Max, I'm going to read you a story about sneaking and peeking.
Are you ready Max?' asked Ruby.
'Yes,' said Max.
'Then listen up,' said Ruby.²⁶

Framed within Max and Ruby's contemporary narrative, Pandora is 'a little girl' (also a rabbit) who is left alone at home while her mother goes out shopping.²⁷ Beginning with the standard fairy tale opening 'once upon a time', the antiquity of the setting is clarified by the standard visual signifiers of

²⁵ The ideological consequences of telling the stories of Prometheus and Pandora together and separately are explored in Stephens and McCallum. p.78, 80

²⁶ Wells. n.pag.

²⁷ Ibid.

the ancient world: fluted columns, grape vines, and the glittering blue waters of the Mediterranean. Both Pandora and her mother are dressed in togas and sandals. Before she leaves, the mother outlines the activities her daughter can entertain herself with but states firmly that her magic jewelry box is off limits. Left alone, Pandora does her best to keep herself amused but finds that her thoughts return repeatedly to the box. Eventually, she cannot contain her curiosity any longer and peeks just 'for half a second'.²⁸ As soon as she does so, the house is overrun with swarms of horrible insects: twister bees, fire ants, and Mexican jumping weevils. Terrified and guilt ridden, Pandora is saved by a little green spider, who after declaring 'I am your only hope!' spins a web 'so big, wide, and wonderful' that all the insects are caught and eaten.²⁹ After extracting a promise from Pandora that she will 'never snoop again', the spider retires to its home within the jewelry box.

The mother then returns home and praises Pandora for her good behaviour in her absence. As a reward, she declares (rather anachronistically) that they will go to the movies.³⁰ In an intriguing conclusion, Pandora and her mother get dressed up using jewelry from the box. Pandora wears a necklace of golden insects, while her mother puts on an emerald pin in the shape of a spider. John Stephens and Robyn McCallum have produced an interesting reading of these details, proposing that although Pandora escaped retribution for her disobedience, the necklace is an external manifestation of Pandora's guilt. 'Whether or not this subtler point is recogni[s]ed,' they write, 'the book carries a clear message about obedience and proper child behaviour.'³¹

The ideal reader response to this narrative is guided by Max, who, after being read Pandora's story, can now apply it to his own situation. I am particularly interested in Wells' representation of a child being read a myth within a book intended to be read to young children. These sorts of metafictional moments figure frequently in recent retellings of classical myth, and have the effect of reminding the reader of the performative context for the story within which they themselves are participating. The

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Wells has produced an even more radical reworking of the Midas myth in Max and Ruby's Midas: Another Greek Myth. While the text remains a treatise warning against the excessive greed, the story ventures into new territory. Max is delighted with his ability to transform his unwanted healthy dinner into dessert, until he accidentally turns his gaze upon his family members. *Max and Ruby's Midas: Another Greek Myth* (London: Random House Children's Books, 2003).

³¹ Stephens and McCallum. p.80

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presence of children – as both readers and players - within the transaction of myth highlights their crucial role as the inheritors of the mythological tradition.

Robert Burleigh's text *Pandora*, illustrated by Raul Colón, also displays a marked self-consciousness about storytelling, although in this text, the focus is on the oral rather than written tradition.³² The Foreword invites the audience to 'Listen to the story of Pandora and the mysterious jar', and goes on to suggest that all stories are interconnected.³³ Colón's illustrations support this by depicting simultaneous narratives within a single frame – Pandora is at once collecting water from the well, tending the hearth, and picking olives from the tree, and all the while wondering what is in the jar. (Singularly, this text does acknowledge the original *pithos* tradition).

*All the songs and old stories seemed somehow to lead back...
To the mysterious sealed jar.*³⁴

With these words, Burleigh articulates the alluring power of the myth of Pandora. Her jar, or box, as the vessel is more famously, although erroneously remembered, remains one of the most fascinating relics of the Greek mythological corpus, a container within which the troubles of the world are stored, together with the mitigating force of Hope.

The jar tells a story of its own. Inspecting it closely, Pandora realises that it is inscribed with another simultaneous narrative, that of Prometheus. Like Max, who was able to apply Pandora's experience to his own situation, Burleigh's Pandora wonders if Prometheus' punishment is a warning for her. In each case, the characters apply lessons learned from myth to their own lives, encouraging the external audience to do the same.

Knowing that she is forbidden to open the vessel, Pandora seeks to distract herself with other stories. She sings 'ancient songs' and 'with a small brush painted old stories on the white tiles' in the courtyard. In an attempt to avoid her own narrative, Pandora engages with other stories, but ultimately finds herself returned to her own story. The myth follows its inexorable course, and Pandora becomes responsible for unleashing War and Anger, Falsehoods and Lies upon the world. But once again the

³² Burleigh.

³³ Ibid. n.pag.

³⁴ Ibid. n.pag.

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emphasis is not on the world as a ruined, devastated place, but rather on the power of Hope. In keeping with the Hesiodic tradition, Pandora keeps Hope within the jar, and intends to 'hold on to it tightly – As long as she lived.'³⁵ By extension, the myth itself endures, carefully preserved for new readers to encounter.

³⁵ Ibid.

Marygold

Alongside the practice of fleshing out the childhoods of traditional figures is the practice of inventing new child characters and inserting them into the mythic tradition. The fabric of myth is loosely woven; it contains spaces into which contemporary authors can place their own creations, and such creations serve to enhance a story's appeal for a young audience, who are presented with a character with whom they can easily identify. Marygold's invention serves not only to locate the figure of the child at the centre of the narrative,³⁶ but also to reframe the myth's moral within retellings produced for child readers. The story no longer simply warns against the dangers of greed, but also promotes the value of children; even more precious than gold.

One of the most striking examples of this process is the figure of Marygold, the daughter of King Midas. She first appears in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Tanglewood Tales*. The text openly acknowledges the invention of the character, with Eustace stating that Midas 'had a little daughter, whom nobody but myself ever heard of'.³⁷ While Hawthorne draws closely upon ancient versions of the myth, following Ovid in highlighting Midas' folly via his inability to eat or drink,³⁸ his account intensifies the horror of the King's predicament by having him transform his own daughter into a golden statue. According to Ellen Butler Donovan, '[i]t is her transformation, rather than King Midas' cognition that he will be unable to eat his own food, that convinces Midas that other things have more value than gold.'³⁹

Hawthorne's invention has influenced many more recent retellings of the Midas myth, which consistently furnish the king with a daughter. Marygold has become so deeply embedded within the tradition; even the eminent Robert Graves refers to her in his retelling, despite the fact that no ancient text mentions her.⁴⁰ She serves to highlight the profound, yet regularly unacknowledged influence Hawthorne has had upon contemporary retellings.

³⁶ 'A daughter is invented for King Midas and the story is made to turn on her.' Robert D Richardson, "Myth and Fairy Tale in Hawthorne's Stories for Children," *Journal of American Culture* 2, no. 2 (1979). p.344

³⁷ Hawthorne. p.28

³⁸ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Mary M. Innes (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1955). p.249

³⁹ Donovan. p.34. This point has also been recognised by Laffrado. She writes that it is 'the love for her that will transcend Midas' greed.' p.78

⁴⁰ 'Marygold became part of the Midas legend in many people's memories.' Elizabeth Cook, *The Ordinary and the Fabulous: An Introduction to Myths, Legends and Fairy Tales*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969; 1976). p.86

Geraldine McCaughrean's 'The Golden Wish' in *Myths and Legends of the World: The Golden Hoard* follows Hawthorne's treatment closely, presenting the transformation of a child into gold as the ultimate horror.⁴¹ Significantly, this retelling does not refer to Marygold by name. In keeping the child anonymous, the ties to her provenance as a character from *A Wonder Book* are severed and her independence within the mythic corpus is consolidated. In an earlier publication, *The Orchard Book of Greek Myths*, McCaughrean furnishes Midas not with a daughter, but with a young son instead.⁴² These various incarnations serve as a testament to the fluidity of the mythic tradition, in which a character with no record in the ancient tradition becomes progressively embedded within contemporary retellings, yet is open to reinvention.

Francesca Simon's *Helping Hercules* goes a step further. In her text, the notion that Midas has a child is so thoroughly entrenched that she claims the role, or rather the space it occupies in the narrative, for her own invented characters. Armed with a magic coin, Susan and her brother travel from the present into the world of myth, where they are mistaken for the children of Midas. Following the requirements of the narrative, they are the ones who end up being turned to gold.

The transformation brings this otherwise fast-paced narrative to an abrupt, tedious, halt:

This is boring, thought Susan.
This is very boring, she thought, some time later.
THIS IS EXTREMELY BORING! she fumed.⁴³

At length, Susan and her brother are liberated when Midas' gift is reversed. Yet by focalising the story from the perspective of the girl turned into a golden statue, Simon's text reveals the ways in which contemporary retellings are able to imagine unique, unexpected perspectives on the traditional tales of classical mythology. Hawthorne's invention of Marygold has paved the way for radical new ways

⁴¹ Geraldine McCaughrean, *The Golden Hoard: Myths and Legends of the World* (New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 1995).

⁴² *The Orchard Book of Greek Myths*. p.39

⁴³ Simon. p.98

of retelling the myth. Even in her absence,⁴⁴ Marygold is a crucial personality in the mythic tradition, helping not only her father, but also her readers, realise what is truly important.

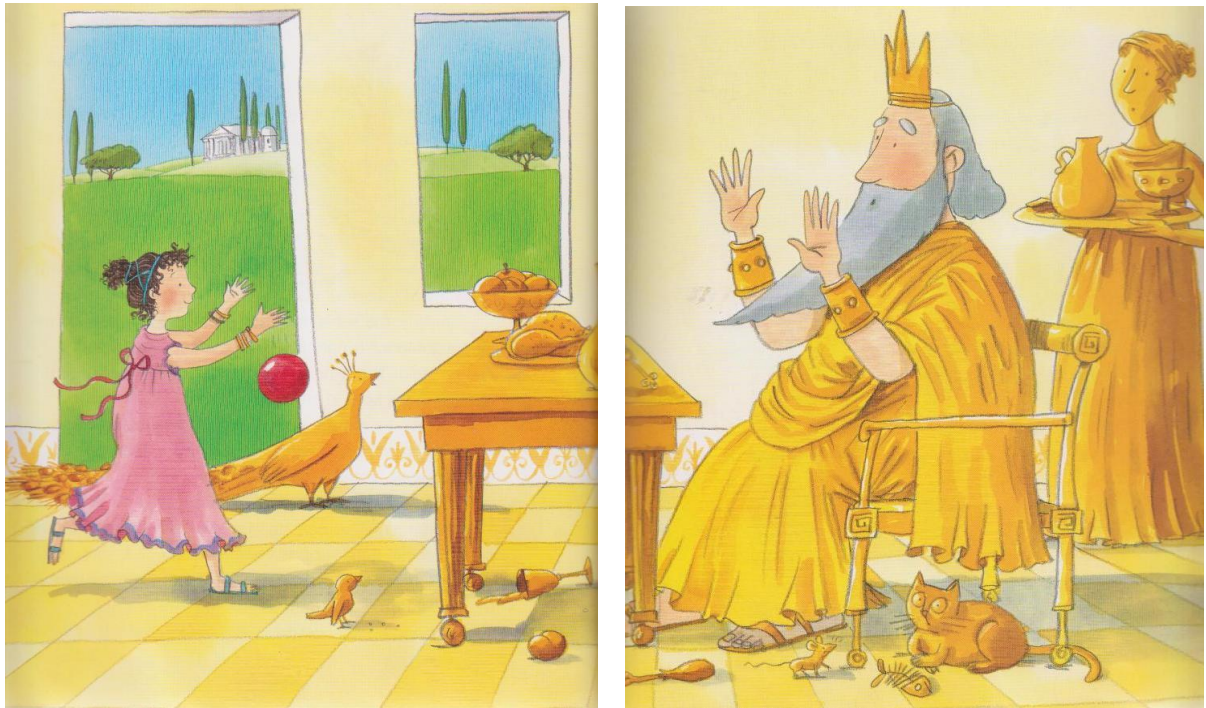


Figure 5: Saviour Pirota's *Orchard Book of First Greek Myths* (2003) illustrated by Jan Lewis, p.22-3

In some retellings the transformation of the child into a golden statue is narrowly avoided. In Saviour Pirota's version in *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths*, Midas' daughter, once again unnamed, survives to help her father to reverse the spell. A double page illustration depicts her running to embrace her hapless father (Figure 5). Wearing a pretty pink dress, and caught in the act of tossing a red ball in the air, she seems intensely animated in contrast to everything else in the room - the king's robes, the serving woman, the food-laden table, the cat – all of which is static, cold, and gold. The story's closing moral, that '[s]ome things are much more precious than gold',⁴⁵ carries the implication that children understand this message in a way their parents may not, and it is they themselves which are so precious.

⁴⁴ Where does the 'real' Marygold go when Susan and her brother take her place in the story? It is tempting, but pointless, to ponder the logic of this sort of time-space travel. Chapter five addresses the subject in greater detail.

⁴⁵ Pirota, *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths*.p.26

Children Matter: *Goddess of Yesterday*

With its manifesto ‘children matter’, Caroline Cooney’s *Goddess of Yesterday* can be read as a treatise on the place of the child within the world of myth. The way in which Anaxandra repeatedly appropriates other identities reflects Cooney’s own act of writing in a young girl into the hallowed story of the Trojan War. More generally, the text upholds the figure of the child as sacred. Like women, the young are cast as the potential victims of war who require and deserve protection from such horrors. This is a heavy theme for a work of children’s literature to engage with, but as noted in the previous Chapters, retellings of Greek myth seem to follow their own set of rules when it comes to determining what young readers should and should not be exposed to.

Like many retellers of the tale of Troy, Cooney blends together traditional characters well known from the mythic tradition with her own inventions, including her protagonist, Anaxandra. In her Afterword, she attempts to highlight where she departed from the ancient sources, but finds a clear cut line difficult to distinguish:

Here are the “true” parts of my story – but in this case, “true” means what ancient authors tell us. Perhaps it isn’t true; perhaps it’s all myth. Ancient writers don’t agree with one another; there are different versions of each event.⁴⁶

In this way, she ends up asserting the legitimacy of her own account of the events of this well-known narrative. As the following Chapter will argue, it is a story which remains perpetually open to recrafting and reinterpretation. As so many others have done, Cooney writes into the gaps of the mythic tradition, both in terms of her characterisations and the way in which the events are construed. Significantly, the narrative is set prior to the war itself, concluding shortly after the arrival of the Greek fleet at Troy. As a result Cooney avoids her story encountering events that are covered in detail by Homer, although she does draw upon some Iliadic moments, particularly from Book three. Most strikingly, Achilles receives no mention at all.

As a six year old, Anaxandra is taken from her family’s humble island, by a kindly pirate king named Nicander. After inadvertently revealing the location of her father’s hidden treasure hoard, she loses all value as a hostage, but ends up being raised in Nicander’s household as a playmate for his sickly

⁴⁶ Cooney. p.255

daughter Callisto. When she is twelve, another band of pirates attacks Suphnos, slaughtering Nicander and laying waste to his kingdom and all its inhabitants. Miraculously, Anaxandra survives the carnage and through a clever impersonation of the dread goddess Medusa, manages to drive the bandits away. She buries the king and remains alone on the devastated island until being discovered by Menelaus on a return journey from Troy. When Menelaus mistakenly assumes she is the daughter of the murdered Nicander, Anaxandra does not correct him, and motivated by a strong will to survive, ends up declaring herself to be Callisto, claiming both her identity and her birthright. Menelaus takes her home with him to Sparta, where Helen, cast here as a formidable figure, is the only one to see through Anaxandra's ruse. Helen hates the girl with a passion, and makes her life a misery.

The text's portrayal of Helen is one of the most compelling, and also fascinating, of all such treatments in contemporary young adult fiction. Where other authors have cast her as a hapless victim of the gods or the politics of men, Cooney's Helen is a figure with considerable power and influence. Anyone in her presence 'breathed in her rhythm and looked where her eyes looked.'⁴⁷ And yet in spite of her mystique, the text makes clear, she remains subject to the decisions of her husband. Although her cruelty towards Anaxandra and her neglect of her own son makes her impossible to sympathise with, the text nevertheless offers significant insights into her psychology. Helen and Menelaus are an incompatible couple; with Paris, Helen finds her male complement. The ancient queen Aethra, mother of Theseus, whom Helen rejoices in seeing brought low, proposes that Helen is jealous of Anaxandra because of the attention Menelaus bestows on her.

When Helen elopes with Paris, Anaxandra, impersonating Callisto, takes the place of Hermione in Helen's retinue to Troy, and acts as nursemaid to Menelaus and Helen's baby son Pleisthenes. The trick is exposed when the fleet arrives at Sidon. Cooney draws upon a fragment of the Epic Cycle poem the *Cypria* to supply Helen and Menelaus with a son whom Helen takes with her to Troy.⁴⁸ Like Hawthorne's insertion of Marygold into the Midas myth, the presence of the child of Helen reframes and adds depth to Cooney's narrative. It expands the portrayal of Helen as a maternal figure, although she neglects Pleis when it does not suit her to appear as a loving mother. As Troy grows ever more hostile to the son of Menelaus, Anaxandra realises that her main purpose is to keep the little boy safe,

⁴⁷ Ibid. p.75

⁴⁸ *Greek Epic Fragments*, trans. Martin L. West (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003). *Cypria*, fr. 9

and in the story's climax, she manages to escape Troy through an underground tunnel, cross the plain, and reunite the baby with his loving father.

With Pleisthenes as an exemplar, the sacred status of children is asserted throughout the narrative. Anaxandra declares she 'hated stories where children died.'⁴⁹ Like many moments within the text, this comment appears to have metafictional significance for Cooney's own narrative. *On the Seas to Troy* is not a story in which children die, but one in which they, and those who love them, are celebrated. Anaxandra later declares that she 'loved how Menelaus loved his children.'⁵⁰ Helen might find him an ineffectual warlord, but readers are encouraged to follow Anaxandra in appreciating Menelaus' qualities as a nurturing father.

The ease with which Anaxandra appropriates the identities of Callisto and Hermione once again serves as testament to the fluidity of the mythic tradition, blending together figures well known from ancient sources with invented characters. The narrative develops as an ascending scale from ignorance to worldliness as Anaxandra escapes her humble beginnings on 'a primitive rock' and assumes a place in myth itself.⁵¹ The way in which she seizes control of her own life story, inventing the names of Callisto's ancestors and a reason to explain why she remains unbetrothed,⁵² forms a reflection of the way in which authors like Cooney, who engage in the rewriting of myth, create their own narratives. Watching farmers at work in the fields, Anaxandra worries '[h]aving set in motion my new life, could I keep it swinging back and forth, like a scythe?'⁵³ The storytelling process is cast as a rhythmic force, one which requires balance and strength to be sustained.

As the focalising character, Anaxandra allows child readers privileged access to the visceral experience of the Trojan War. Her first person narrative is compelling and detailed. She witnesses key events that loom large in the mythic tradition: the charged first encounter between Paris and Helen; the celebrations of the Trojans as Helen enters their city while Cassandra's prophecies of doom go unheard and unheeded; and Helen standing on the battlements surveying the battlefield below,

⁴⁹ . p.51

⁵⁰ Ibid. p.92

⁵¹ Ibid. p.72

⁵² Ibid. p.76-7

⁵³ Ibid. p.67

exulting in the sight of two armies fighting for her. When Paris arrives at Sparta, Anaxandra knows that she should keep away, but finds she 'could not bear to miss anything.'⁵⁴ By extension, readers of the story are also permitted to observe these significant events.

Like a number of other rewritings of Greek myth for young adult readers, the text also takes the shape of a teenage romance.⁵⁵ In Troy Anaxandra is introduced to Hector's friend Euneus, the king of Lemnos. Cooney follows Homer in keeping Euneus as a neutral figure during the war,⁵⁶ but she develops her own portrait of him by making him young, handsome and nice. He takes her for a horseback ride and gives her a puppy to replace one she lost as a child. After the exhilarating horseride, he kisses her, and on their second meeting, he shows her 'other things that were perfect'.⁵⁷ This phrase is so oblique it could refer to just about anything, but in the context of their flirtations, seems to refer to some sort of sexual liaison, though only in the most euphemistic terms. With Pleisthenes restored to his father at the story's close, Menelaus arranges for Anaxandra to be sent to Lemnos, where, it is implied, a happy ending for her awaits.

Yet while titillating young readers with this romance, the text does not conceal the grim reality of war and its human cost. Women and children are upheld as the victims. Although the narrative concludes before the war begins in earnest, the text makes repeated references to women being raped, brutalised, and enslaved.⁵⁸ Equally, the text emphasises the innocence of children in the face of adult machinations. In the first serious battle, Paris employs the image of the child victim of war to encourage the Trojans to fight:

'Menelaus is murdering our children!' shouted Paris, from a rather safe spot near the gates. I had not been aware that Paris cared about the safety of children. 'Menelaus tramples our children in his path!' he shouted, arousing the men to greater fighting. 'Menelaus stabs to death the helpless infant!'⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Ibid. p.97

⁵⁵ Gillian Engberg, "Grrrls of the Ancient World," *The Booklist* 99.9, no. 10 (Jan 2003). p.871

⁵⁶ Cooney. p.260, cf. Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951; 1961). 7.467-8

⁵⁷ Cooney. p.206

⁵⁸ Unsurprisingly, Helen's attitude provides a stark counterpoint, as she stands on the battlements and exults in the bloody spectacle of men dying in her name.

⁵⁹ Cooney. p.234

It is Paris' cries that prompt Anaxandra to realise and assert that children matter, a message which, I have sought to show, is asserted in a variety of ways throughout the text. In addition, the narrative's preoccupation with the figure of the child has consequences that reach beyond the scope of the story to extend to commentary on the process of writing and rewriting of myth itself. In her review of the text, Angela Reynolds writes that 'Cooney has taken the basic facts of a well-known Creek [sic] myth and turned them into a grand adventure with a heroic girl at the centre, creating a fictional situation and characters inside the known story.'⁶⁰ She draws attention to the way in which the text has re-centred the story of the Trojan War around the figure of the young girl Anaxandra, and found a way to weave invented details within the established narrative framework. The following Chapter will return to this subject, with an emphasis on how Cooney and other contemporary writers work within the gaps of the Troy story.

Conclusion

This Chapter has investigated ways in which mythic retellings produced for children have found spaces in the narrative for child characters, both traditional and invented, to articulate their own experience of myth. In what could be read as an allusion to the suppression of child voices within the mythic tradition, in *Goddess of Yesterday*, Anaxandra asks her goddess to hear her 'even in silence'.⁶¹ Her realisation that '[t]he gods could hear a silent prayer'⁶² seems to confirm the power of children to articulate the stories of myth, even when previously kept silent in the mythic tradition.

In a reflection of their reframing as children's literature, retellings of myth written for the young have placed the figure of the child at the centre of the story. This has been achieved through a range of different strategies, including the recasting of traditional figures as children or childish characters, as well as the widespread invention of young protagonists (often young girls) who observe and participate in the well-known events. The particular prominence of female figures can be seen as a response to, and extension of, feminist rewritings for adults published during the 1970s and 80s. These texts seek to redress the misogyny of the mythic tradition by emphasising female characters

⁶⁰ Angela J. Reynolds, "'Goddess of Yesterday' Book Review," *School Library Journal* 48, no. 6 (June 2002). p.134

⁶¹ Cooney. p.46

⁶² Ibid.

Chapter Three

and their perspectives. Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Firebrand* and Colleen McCulloch's *The Song of Troy* frame the story of the Trojan War against the backdrop of the overthrow of a matriarchal, earth goddess worshipping culture by a patriarchal system.⁶³ Contemporary reworkings of the Troy story will be addressed in greater detail in the Chapter which follows.

Childhood is a sacred time because it is temporary. Drawing upon attitudes first shaped in the Romantic Period, many retellings promote the value of the young, highlighting their special knowledge and gifts. They are naïve, and yet at the same time, more knowing than adults, having not lost their ability to see things as they truly are. In James Reeves' *The Trojan Horse*, it is a young child who recognises the true nature of the ruse, when all the adults remain blind to it.⁶⁴

This Chapter has maintained an intratextual focus, concentrating on the appearance of children as characters within the narrative. But it seems that it is impossible to separate out the role of children as the readers of myth, and as the inheritors of the mythic tradition, from their position as players within the stories themselves. In writing children into myth, authors encourage child readers to experience the immediacy of the mythic narratives. The young protagonists are easy to identify with; flawed, honest and accessible.

This conclusion brings to an end the first of the three sections of this thesis. Concentrating on the overarching theme of the child, it has explored both the tradition of retelling the stories of Ancient Greek myth to children, and the implications of doing so. In the second Chapter, the focus shifted to the prominent relationship between child and adult. Via psychoanalytic readings of several hero myths, it asserted that such stories help to mirror – and to normalise - the often difficult transition from childhood into maturation. Finally, this Chapter has addressed the practice of writing children in to the world of myth, affirming their importance as not only the inheritors, but also the perpetrators, of the mythic tradition.

⁶³ Marion Zimmer Bradley, *The Firebrand* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986). Colleen McCulloch, *The Song of Troy* (London: Orion Books, 1998). For an analysis feminist retellings of the Trojan saga, with a close reading of Bradley's work, see Diane P. Thompson, *The Trojan War: Literature and Legends from the Bronze Age to the Present* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2004). p.184-193

⁶⁴ Reeves.

Chapter Three

The three Chapters which follow are connected by the governing theme of *myth*, addressing the complexities of its reworking, its staging and setting, and the sometimes close, yet at other times impossibly distant, connection between the world of myth and the present.

Chapter Four: Reworking Troy

This Chapter, which marks the beginning of the central section of this thesis as a whole, focuses on the transformation of myth by contemporary writers of children's literature. I will chart a variety of rewriting strategies employed by contemporary storytellers, using the tale of the Trojan War as a case study. This story is so vast, so renowned, and so deeply embedded in the Western cultural consciousness that it provides enormous scope for creative reworking.¹ It has resulted in innumerable retellings, including many written for children. In spite of often dramatic changes in genre and tone, reworkings maintain a close connection with the ancient form of the story.² Contemporary storytellers are constrained by the fixed events and narrative order of the mythic tradition and argue that they write into its gaps, empty spaces and openings. Because of the complexity of the story and the gaps within the ancient versions, writers of young adult fiction have been afforded a great deal of freedom in developing their own stories of the Trojan War. I will show that these texts are consistently self-conscious about what they are doing to the myth of Troy.

At their most fundamental level, the myths are stories which develop and change through repeated performance. In his book *Retelling/Rereading: The Fate of Storytelling in Modern Times*, Karl Kroeber writes that it is often overlooked that 'stories are always retold, and are meant to be retold, reheard, reread, that narrative is a repeating form of discourse – in which every repetition is unique.'³ It is interesting that like myth, the genre of children's literature is closely associated with repetition.⁴ When I am feeling unsettled, I regularly revisit my favourite books from childhood. And as a mother to young children, I know firsthand just how often children love to be read the same book over and over again.

¹ Michael Wood declares 'the tale is the bedrock of western culture.' Michael Wood, *In Search of the Trojan War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). p.15

² In the *Luck of Troy*, Roger Lancelyn Green defends his creative reinterpretation of the famous tale by insisting that 'no character in the story is invented.' Roger Lancelyn Green, *The Luck of Troy* (London: Puffin, 1961; 1997). p.10

³ Kroeber. p.3

⁴ In this way it can be contrasted with literature written for adults, which privileges new, previously untold stories, implicit in the very name of the *novel*.

All of these texts are self-referential about their position within the storytelling tradition. Rather than claiming to be the singular, authoritative version of a tale, they take pains to highlight that they are part of a greater tradition, stretching back to antiquity and into an as yet unrealised future. In the final part of this Chapter I reflect upon the broader implications of engaging with the mythic tradition in this way. I question how is it that we are able to recognise different retellings as versions of the same myth. Monica Fludernik speaks of ‘the common core’ around which different narratives are constructed,⁵ while Barry Powell refers to a ‘constant, partly invisible, internal structure’ which ‘makes it possible for us to say that Homer’s story of Oedipus and Sophocles’ story are both, despite their differences, “the myth of Oedipus”.’⁶ But in order to be regarded as part of this myth, must every Oedipus kill his father? Must he blind himself? Be named Oedipus? This Chapter will examine if there is a limit to how much a text can change before it ceases to be a retelling of a myth.

Adaptations across Genre: Three Tales of Troy

Julie Sanders identifies that adaptation is principally a change across genre,⁷ and the process of changing a traditional tale into a children’s story involves significant shifts in terms of vocabulary, cadence and physical form. Of particular note is the addition of illustrations, which add a crucial new dimension to the reworked text. Sanders distinguishes forms of adaptation, in which a text is transferred wholesale from one genre to another, from more complex acts of textual appropriation, which can be read as texts in their own right.⁸ Benjamin Lefebvre points out that ‘textual transformations have for a long time been the norm rather than the exception’ in children’s literature, arguing that a range of ideological, financial and artistic factors motivate the process.⁹

⁵ Fludernik. p.3

⁶ Barry B Powell, *Classical Myth*, 5th ed. (Upper Saddle River NJ: Pearson Education, 2001; 2007). p.697

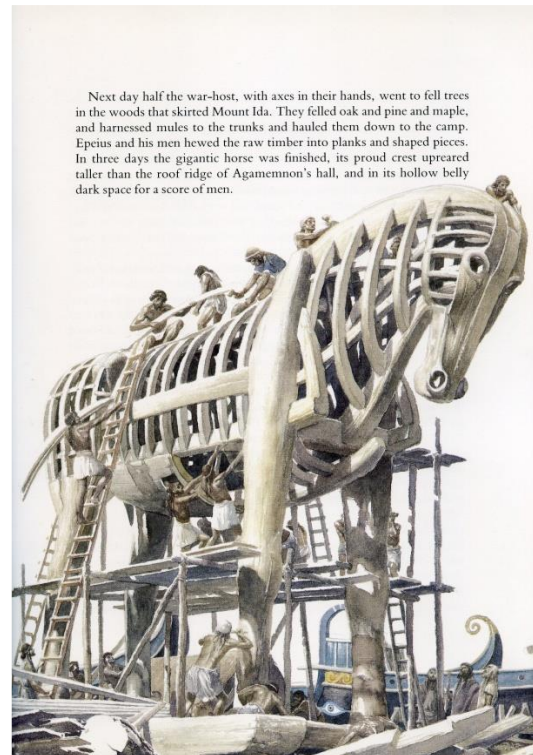
⁷ Sanders. p.20

⁸ Ibid. p.26

⁹ Benjamin Lefebvre, ed. *Textual Transformations in Children's Literature: Adaptations, Translations, Reconsiderations* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2013). p.2

Other scholars use different terminology to refer to the phenomenon. Gerard Genette speaks of direct and indirect transformation,¹⁰ while Jack Zipes refers to the ‘transfiguration’ of classical fairy tales.¹¹ I am choosing to use terms with a ‘re-’ prefix: retelling, rewriting, reworking, as they help to highlight the interrelationship of different versions of the same story, both through oral and textual transmission. In addition, they point to the crucial part played by repetition within the storytelling process.

Although Rosemary Sutcliff’s *Black Ships Before Troy: The Story of the Iliad* was published too late to be included in Antoinette Brazouski and Mary J. Klatt’s bibliography of children’s books about classical myth, one can assume that these critics would hold Sutcliff in high esteem for her faithfulness to the spirit of Homer’s original.¹² Sutcliff’s text is among the most comprehensive retellings of the Troy story produced for contemporary children. Best known as a writer of children’s historical fiction, Sutcliff’s retelling of the Trojan War has a sober, scholarly tone. Although published in the format of a large-scale, hard-back picture book, this is a lengthy work of 128 pages, divided into chapters which correspond to the book divisions of the original poem. But *Black Ships* does depart from Homer in one crucial way. In spite of the impression given by the subtitle, the text does not limit itself to the narrative boundaries of the *Iliad*, but instead tells the full story of the war, from its



Next day half the war-host, with axes in their hands, went to fell trees in the woods that skirted Mount Ida. They felled oak and pine and maple, and harnessed mules to the trunks and hauled them down to the camp. Epeius and his men hewed the raw timber into planks and shaped pieces. In three days the gigantic horse was finished, its proud crest upreared taller than the roof ridge of Agamemnon’s hall, and in its hollow belly dark space for a score of men.

Figure 6: Rosemary Sutcliff’s *Black Ships Before Troy* (1993) illustrated by Alan Lee, p.111

¹⁰Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982; 1997). pp.5-6

¹¹ Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization*. p.180

¹² Rosemary Sutcliff, *Black Ships before Troy* (London: Frances Lincoln, 1993). Brazouski and Klatt write that ‘scholars in the area of children’s literature, not to mention classicists, tend to think that the best adaptations are those which can be easily comprehended by the child and yet retain both the plot and tone of the original work...’ Brazouski and Klatt. p.xi

causes to the ultimate destruction of the city. In this way, it seeks to familiarise readers with the full span of the Trojan War story.

Alan Lee's watercolour illustrations are detailed and realistic in style, investing this treatment with a secondary level of authority. His use of a muted palette of grey, brown and blue helps to convey a sense of exhaustion after a decade of inconclusive conflict. Lee's depiction of the wooden horse is particularly striking. In contrast to other treatments which emphasise the horse's woodenness, here the creature is depicted zoomorphically. In the illustration of the construction process (*Figure 6*), the horse takes shape as a white-boned skeleton, one that is later fleshed out with timber and elaborate jewels. At the end of this Chapter I will return to this evocative image to explore its metaphoric significance.

Marcia Williams' *The Iliad and the Odyssey* is a very different sort of retelling from Sutcliff's.¹³ Where *Black Ships* strives for fidelity to the tone of Homer's original work, Williams seeks to appeal to young (and reluctant) readers. Her version takes the form of a comic book, in which the famous heroes of the war are reborn as ugly, yet likable caricatures of themselves. The tone of the text is cheekily irreverent. When Thetis stuffs oranges down Achilles' dress to disguise him as a girl, he objects 'They are not my size, mother. I want melons, at least!'¹⁴ And as Odysseus' bids a hasty retreat, one of the Lotus Eaters quips 'Hey man, we do take-aways.'¹⁵ Although a traditional, objective narrative in the third-person supplements each strip of comics, it is the dialogue of the speech-bubbles that gives the story its momentum.

Despite the irreverence of the comic book format, Williams' work is underpinned by serious research. At times her simple, clever illustrations evoke the design and stylistic techniques of red-figure vase painting, a point which will be addressed in greater detail in the following Chapter. In addition, the text concludes with a self-conscious reference to the afterlife of the myth: 'While stories of the Trojan War and Odysseus' eventful journey home spread across the world, King Odysseus and his loyal Queen Penelope ruled Ithaca wisely and happily.'¹⁶ For all its silliness, Williams' text deserves to be taken

¹³ Marcia Williams, *The Iliad and the Odyssey* (Somerville: Candlewick Press, 1996).

¹⁴ *Ibid.* n.pag.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

seriously as an example of the metafictional awareness at work in so many contemporary retellings of ancient myth.

Julie Sanders notes that adaptations regularly attempt to make a source-text relevant to a new audience by relating its themes to the present context.¹⁷ Paul Fleischman's *Dateline: Troy* highlights the universality of the Troy myth by drawing parallels between episodes of the Trojan cycle and media reports of events of the last century. In the grandiose language that is so typical of the paratexts to mythic retellings, his introduction consolidates the connections between past and present:

Envy-maddened Ajax, love-struck Paris, crafty Odysseus, and all the others have walked the earth in every time and place. They live among us today. Though their tale comes from the distant Bronze Age, it's as current as this morning's headlines. The Trojan War is still being fought. Simply open a newspaper...¹⁸

And so the Judgment of Paris is illustrated by an article about a Miss Universe Pageant,¹⁹ the wooing of Helen is compared to a series of personal advertisements,²⁰ and Odysseus, in his initial unwillingness to go to war, is cast as a draft dodger.²¹ Correspondences with contemporary conflicts are especially prominent, with the Second World, Korean and Vietnam Wars forming potent parallels. It is even suggested that the trick of the wooden horse resembles a terrorist attack, using the Pan Am bombing to consolidate the link. Somewhat ironically, *Dateline: Troy* is not as timeless as Fleischman might have hoped: a decade on, its age was evidently starting to show. A revised edition was released in 2006, adding more contemporary references, including the bombing of the World Trade Centre and the Iraq War, while retaining the format and detail of the original publication.

These three texts each develop a very different frame for the myth of the Trojan War – from Sutcliff's austere, lengthy treatment to Williams' irreverent comic. But while the comic book format or Fleischman's newspaper clippings radically alter the ways in which the myth is represented, in each case, the narrative itself remains traditional. No new characters are introduced, and the events themselves subscribe to the order decreed in the ancient sources. According to the definition of Julie

¹⁷ Sanders. p.19

¹⁸ Paul Fleischman, *Dateline: Troy* (New York: Scholastic, 1996). p.9

¹⁹ Ibid. p.16-7

²⁰ Ibid. p.20-1

²¹ Ibid. p.26-7

Sanders, the texts of Sutcliff, Williams and Fleischman are *adaptations*. They translate the mythic source-text to a new genre but maintain the original structure and scope of the story.

In contrast, Sanders uses the term *appropriation* to describe a text which stands in its own right, and does not depend on a source-text for a frame of reference. As an example, she cites Baz Luhrman's film *Romeo and Juliet* as an adaptation of Shakespeare's play, while the musical *West Side Story* is an appropriation.²² While it is not possible to categorise all texts in such a straightforward way, it is clear that the Troy story is a rich source for more radical kinds of reworkings. The longer format of the young adult novel provides the scope to introduce new characters into the established narrative, and even to experiment with the structure and details of the saga itself. Although there are a number of fixed events within the story of the Trojan War (the Judgment of Paris is considered below), there is also great potential for creative reworking, as recent works by Adele Geras, Caroline Cooney, and Theresa Tomlinson demonstrate.

Gaps and Fragments

Ultimately, the city of Troy will always fall.²³ But before, during, and even after this major event, contemporary writers have found opportunities to play with the way in which the story unfolds. In this section I will address a variety of retellings of the Trojan saga, highlighting the range of different ways this narrative can be retold. I am particularly concerned with the ways in which contemporary texts engage with the spaces within the narrative, and find ways to locate their own tales within such gaps, or else expand upon its fragmentary elements. In spite of the renown of the tale of Troy, and of Helen, for whom the two sides do battle, much of the story remains up for grabs.

Adele Geras' *Troy* retells the story of the war from the perspective of the Trojans under siege, beginning in the ninth year of the conflict and following the events of the *Iliad* through to the city's destruction. Responsibility for the narrative is shared amongst multiple protagonists; its polyphonic structure evoking the notion of manifold ways of telling this famous story. Quite strikingly, all of the focalising characters have been invented by Geras. The leading parts are played by twin sisters Xanthe

²² Sanders. p.27

²³ Pirani writes that 'myth...must take its course, inexorably' Pirani. p.184

and Marpessa, foundling orphans who work as handmaids to Andromache and Helen respectively. Their relationships with these famous characters of the legend provides scope for this text to expand themes only hinted at within the ancient tradition. Andromache reveals to Xanthe that she feels threatened by Helen's close connection with Hector, while Helen shares with Marpessa her pain at having to leave her daughter Hermione behind in Sparta. At all times Geras remains true to Homer's account of the war, but uses the established narrative structure as a springboard to tell her own highly original story.

As in Homer's poem, the gods intervene regularly in the action and regularly act as commentators with knowledge of events to come (these encounters are immediately forgotten by the mortal characters). In response to her questions about Troy's future, and the possibility of the city avoiding its predetermined fate, Hermes tells the slave woman Halie that

'Everything has to be done in the right order, or the whole narrative falls to pieces. One thing has to follow another. You can't skip over anything, or move things along faster. One step at a time'²⁴

This comment, with its emphasis on a fixed, linear chronology, refers to the inevitable outcome of the war, but it also has relevance to the constraints placed upon Geras' reworking. The author may be able to invent a host of new characters through whom to focalise the story, and to develop complex themes out of what is merely hinted at in ancient sources, but this freedom has its limits. Even the most radical, creative reworking of the myth must still remain true to the traditional elements – the bare bones – of the Trojan War story.

Geras' audacity is embodied in another of her protagonists, a young Trojan girl called Polyxena. Yet this is not the princess known from the ancient tradition. Early in the text, she ponders that it is her 'misfortune to be given the same name as Priam's youngest daughter' (31). This nameplay is an embodiment of the authority Geras has claimed to recast the story on her own terms. The mythic tradition is already full of cases of double names (such as the two Ajaxes, the two Diomedes etc.), and in borrowing names from the mythic tradition to give to her own invented characters (Xanthe and Marpessa also figure elsewhere), Geras assumes the role of mythmaker.

²⁴Adele Geras, *Troy* (San Diego: Harcourt, 2001). p.200-1

A focus on names and their accuracy is also a theme within Caroline Cooney's *Goddess of Yesterday*. As the previous Chapter noted, this text is quite unique within the corpus of Trojan War retellings in concentrating on the events precipitating the war, and concluding before the conflict begins in earnest. Anaxandra, must continually correct those who mistakenly address her as Alexandra. 'Most people get it wrong the first time,' she says.²⁵ In this text, the fluidity of names and of identity itself is compounded when, in a desperate act of self-preservation, and although aware that 'it is a shivery thing to seize the name of another [and] ... a shivery thing to cease being oneself' Anaxandra steals the name and the birthright of Callisto.²⁶ Later, still in this disguise, she saves the life of another princess, Hermione, by taking her place in Helen's retinue to Troy.

Here the idea of an invented character assuming the role of an established figure of myth is taken a step further. Like Geras, Cooney plays with the details of the myth and writes her own story into and around the edges of the ancient tradition. The decision to position her story prior to the outbreak of war provides her with more possibilities than the much worked-over territory of the war itself.

One of the most striking aspects of this work is its representation of Helen. While the majority of young adult retellings of the Troy story regard her sympathetically, and elaborate her role in order to give additional insight into her moods and motivations, Cooney goes to the opposite extreme. Anaxandra uses the inherent contradictions of natural and synthesised phenomena to describe this fearsome creature:

O Helen.
Think of hot gold infused on icy silver.
Think of a soft blue sky over an iron-hard sea.
The warmest sun and the coldest marble.
Helen. Swan and Goddess.²⁷

²⁵ Cooney. p.167

²⁶ Ibid. p.47

²⁷ Ibid. p.68

In a reimagining of the *Teichoskopeia*, Helen stands on Troy's battlements and exults 'I am Helen of Troy! This is my battle! Fight for me, you men. Suffer and bleed for me. Die for me.'²⁸ Helen's actions in book 3 of the *Iliad* have been noted for their metafictional awareness,²⁹ but Cooney takes this episode much further in allowing Helen to make such an explicit reference to her future fame.

Cooney makes Helen the villain of her story, the tormentor of the unfortunate yet resourceful Anaxandra. Her representation in this text contrasts sharply with her one-dimensional appearance in Roger Lancelyn Green's *The Luck of Troy*, where she is cast as Paris' hapless victim, enchanted into eloping with a man she quickly comes to despise. Green's Helen is consistently perceived through the eyes of others, with no voice

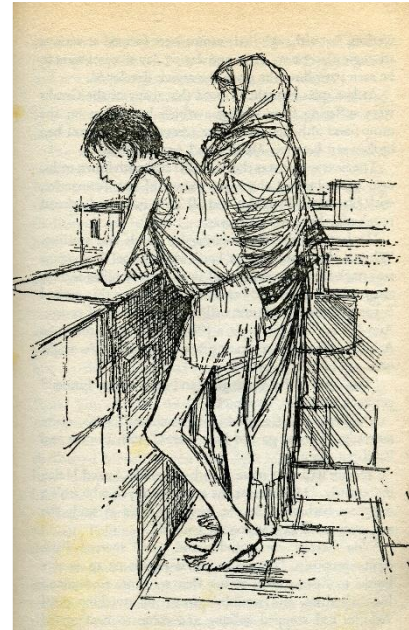


Figure 7: Roger Lancelyn Green's *The Luck of Troy* (1961) illustrated by Margery Gill, p.39

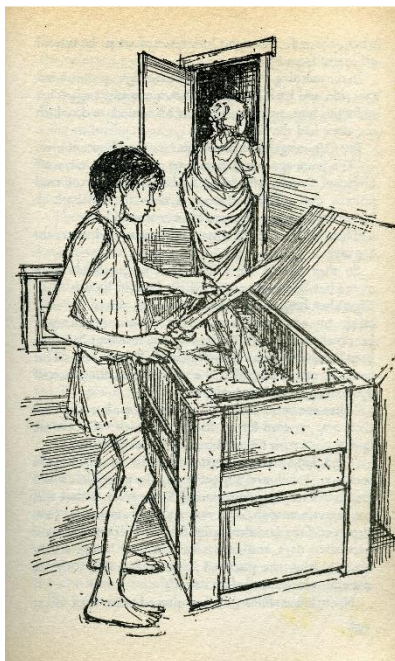


Figure 8: Roger Lancelyn Green's *The Luck of Troy* (1961) illustrated by Margery Gill, p.125

of her own. Margery Gill's sketched illustrations underscore Helen's remoteness by representing her veiled and cloaked (Figure 7) or else obscured from view (Figure 8). This concealment endows her figure with an aura of mystique that leaves readers to form their own judgments on her actions.

The empowerment of female characters, both traditional and invented, is part of a major feminist project to reclaim and recuperate myth. Diane Purkiss has shown how traditional texts have been rewritten from a feminist perspective, most often 'by changing the focus of a narrative from a male character to a female character, or by shifting the terms of the myth so that what was a 'negative' female role-model becomes

²⁸ Ibid. p.233

²⁹ Laurie Maguire, *Helen of Troy: From Homer to Hollywood* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009). p.81

a positive one'.³⁰ Ultimately, Purkiss remains critical of the success of this small-scale approach, arguing that a 'clean' rewriting, free of the baggage of former treatments is impossible.³¹

[T]he rewriting of myth cannot be limited to the rewriting of particular favoured or disliked figures. It can extend to complex engagements with the very place of myth in literature, the place of the woman writer in relation to those discourses, and the displacement of myth as a buried truth of culture.³²

Other feminist scholars remain more optimistic. Marina Warner believes that through retelling comes understanding, which in turn leads to change. 'One of the strategies women can adopt regarding the myths which shape and spark our consciousness is to recast the ancient stories, by retelling them so that they can be understood, and, once understood changed from within.'³³ This practice of granting formerly silent/silenced female characters a 'position from which to write and speak'³⁴ is a feature of numerous adult retellings of the Trojan War saga such as Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Firebrand* and Kerry Greenwood's *Cassandra*.³⁵ These texts recast Troy (and the centres of mainland Greece) as a matriarchal, goddess-worshipping society that comes under attack from the patriarchal Mycenaeans and their Olympian gods. In this way, these authors challenge not merely the myth of the Trojan War but also the history of the late Bronze Age to construct their own narratives.³⁶

Theresa Tomlinson's *Moon Riders* is a young adult equivalent of the works of Zimmer Bradley and Greenwood.³⁷ The protagonist is Myrina, a young Amazon recruit, who, accompanied by her friend the prophetic Trojan princess Cassandra, leads an undercover mission to Aulis to rescue the young princess Iphigenia from sacrifice, and successfully spirit her away to become a Moon Rider acolyte while she waits out the war. Grounded in the tradition of Iphigenia myths in which the goddess Artemis takes pity on her favoured mortal and spares her life, this story takes the process of *mythopoeisis* yet further by liberating Cassandra from her predetermined fate.³⁸

³⁰ Purkiss. pp.441-2

³¹ Ibid. p.455

³² Ibid.

³³ Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form*. p.240

³⁴ Purkiss. p.444

³⁵ Kerry Greenwood, *Cassandra* (Port Melbourne: Mandarin, 1995); Zimmer Bradley.

³⁶ Thompson. p.202

³⁷ Theresa Tomlinson, *The Moon Riders* (London: Corgi, 2002).

³⁸ Using Racine's treatment of the Astyanax story, Genette discusses cases where characters are given the freedom to live a little longer. Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*. p.189

This text does not spare its young readers the grim realities of war. Myrina witnesses Achilles' pillaging of her family and tribe, and as the war continues, loses many Amazon comrades and finally her husband, Tomi in battle against the Greeks. But in spite of such terrible tragedy, the text ends positively, with an emphasis on the preservation of the Moon Rider traditions through the incorporation of the community of former Trojan slave women into the group. The same process takes place on an individual level when after her bereavement, Myrina discovers that she is pregnant, and the legacy of the Mazagardi tribe is carried on by her daughter. In the Epilogue, Myrina, her daughter and Iphigenia use their magic mirrors to watch the slaughter of Agamemnon and rejoice in Cassandra's escape. The links between matriarchal power and traditional knowledge combine to stress the promotion of a feminist agenda.

As this Chapter has demonstrated, the tale of Troy can undergo dramatic shifts in presentation and yet still, unmistakably, be identifiable as a version of the myth. The war could take place somewhere as remote as Mars and yet, on account of other narrative elements, still be a version of the myth.³⁹ This thesis continues to seek answers to why this corpus of tales, whose origins are so remote, has retained contemporary currency. But what exactly does it mean to retell a traditional story? How far can one take the bare bones of a narrative frame before it ceases to be a retelling? Vanda Zajko expresses this as an aspect of 'the tensions inherent in the 're-' of rewriting: if the new 'version' of a myth changes its emphasis sufficiently radically, it may become difficult to associate it with the tradition.'⁴⁰

Conclusion

Historians and teachers, you and your kind, can produce the bare bones, all in their right order, but still bare bones; I and my kind can breathe life into them. And history is not bare bones alone, it's a living process.⁴¹

³⁹ Dan Simmons, *Ilium* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003).

⁴⁰ Vanda Zajko, "Women and Greek Myth," in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Mythology*, ed. Roger D. Woodard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). p.397

⁴¹ Sutcliff, "History and Time." p.111-2

Chapter Four

With this defiant statement, Rosemary Sutcliff articulates a key idea in the process of reworking traditional narrative. The art of retelling, she maintains, is not just about getting the details right; it is about reviving the essential spirit of the story. Significantly, Sutcliff's choice of metaphor evokes one of the illustrations from *Black Ships before Troy*. Alan Lee's representation of the wooden horse literally having the woody flesh wrapped around its bare bones is a vivid and evocative embodiment of the reworking process. The skeleton of Helen's character is provided within the ancient sources, but only modern authors can flesh her out and give her a voice.

Some elements of the tale of Troy – such as Cassandra's story – are free for storytellers to play with. Others, like the Judgement of Paris, seem to be open to change, but turn out to be fixed after all. Others still, the Fall of Troy itself, are immutable. Michael Roemer has written that we 'watch figures from fate's elbow, knowing full well the one thing they cannot know: their future.'⁴² Many of the texts contain metafictional comments about fate and predestination. Like the gods, contemporary authors have the abilities to see the tradition from above and to make alterations to it, but also like the gods, they do not have unlimited powers.

This Chapter has examined the diverse ways in which the tale of Troy has been retold as a means of investigating the broader implications of the act of retelling. It addressed both straightforward retellings which transform the genre but maintain the scope of the traditional narrative, as well as more radical reworkings which invent new characters and plotlines. It is clear that contemporary authors have an enormous amount of freedom to play with, and within, the established mythic tradition. Their freedom, however, is not boundless, and they must always maintain a degree of fidelity to the original story.

⁴² Michael Roemer, *Telling Stories: Postmodernism and the Invalidation of Traditional Narrative* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995). p.3

Chapter Five: Setting the Scene

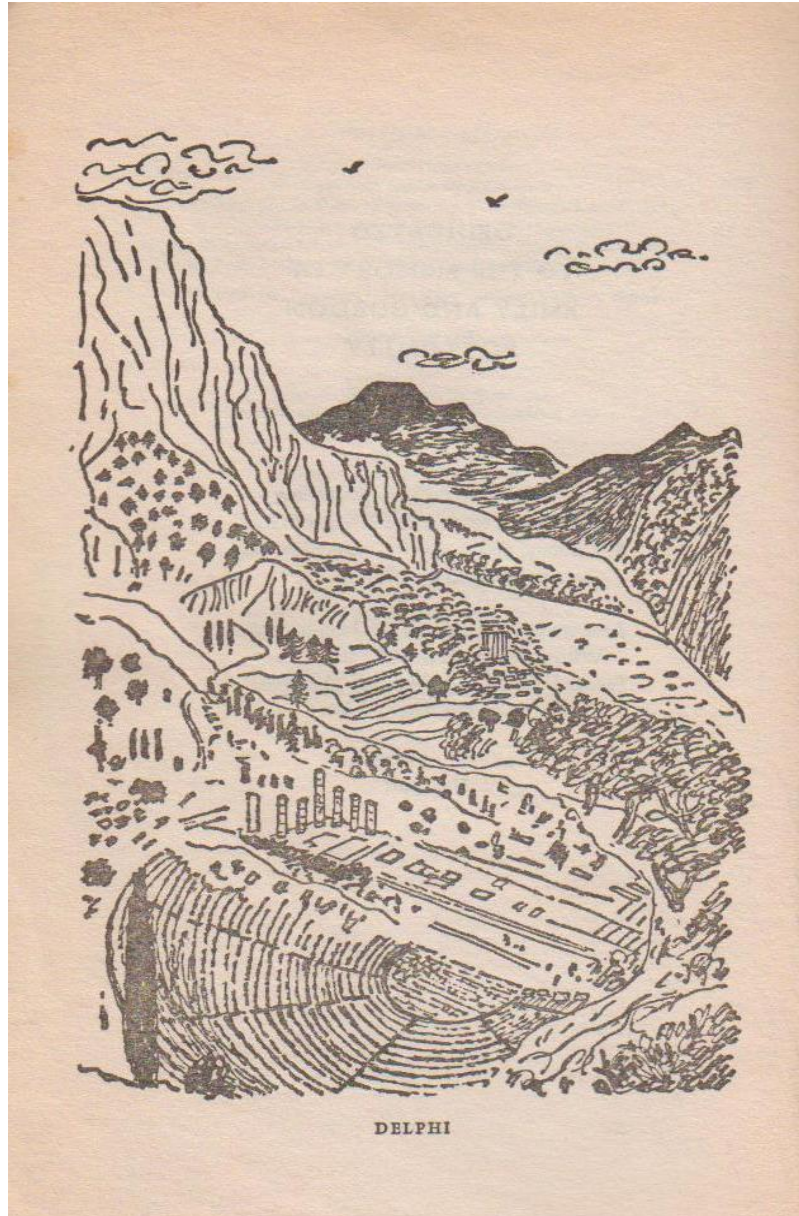


Figure 9: Roger Lancelyn Green's *Tales of the Greek Heroes* (1958) illustrated by Betty Middleton-Sandford

My first encounter with Greek mythology was when I was eight years old, via the work of Roger Lancelyn Green (1918 – 1987), the Oxford graduate on the periphery of CS Lewis and JRR Tolkien's Inklings group. During the middle years of the twentieth century, Green published numerous volumes of traditional tales retold for young children. His retellings of the Greek myths, *The Tale of Troy*, *Tales of the Greek Heroes* and *The Luck of Troy*, are among his best known works, but he also published

retellings of Egyptian, Norse and Celtic myths.¹ I read Green's books over and over again, and to this day they remain vivid in my mind.

I can remember being fascinated by this image of Delphi (*Figure 9*), drawn by Betty Middleton-Sandford, which appears opposite the Table of Contents page in Green's *Tales of the Greek Heroes*. As not only the first, but also one of the largest illustrations in the text, the image plays a crucial role in setting the scene for the stories which follow. The picture features a panoramic view of the ruins of Delphi as they appear today, but I don't think that I was aware of this disjuncture between mythic past and contemporary reality when I was eight. What fascinated me then, and still strikes me when I look at it now, is the sheer majesty of the landscape, the towering cliffs, the little groves of olive trees, the upright columns of the temple complex and the sweeping arc of the theatre. This simple sketch has helped to establish what for me is the quintessential essence of the mythological landscape, the place where the stories I loved reading so much took place.

This Chapter will study the ways in which the mythic landscape has been depicted in stories published for children and young adults. It employs Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the literary chronotope to analyse the way in which the world of myth is fleshed out as a fully realised place.² While Bakhtin was concerned with the construction of time and space via written language, I am also interested in the significance of visual signs, and will seek to show that Bakhtin's framework applies equally well in this context. I will argue that the mythological chronotope is recognisable by its display of classical details – the marble temples, fluted columns and grapevines. In his study of films set in the ancient world, including those which rework mythological material, Jon Solomon has argued that 'part of the reason for antiquity's cinematic attraction is simply its colourful costumes, classical architecture, and military heroics – the vaguely familiar trappings of our past.'³ The recurrence of these 'familiar trappings', as exemplified by Middleton-Sandford's depiction of the ruins of Delphi, highlight that children's retellings depict a vision of the world of myth that is strikingly consistent.

In the first part of this Chapter, I will concentrate on the ways in which a mythological setting is created pictorially. In *Looking at Pictures in Picture Books*, Jane Doonan asserts that illustrations are more

¹ Green, *The Tale of Troy; Tales of the Greek Heroes; The Luck of Troy*.

² Bakhtin.

³ Solomon. p.xvii

than mere accompaniments for a written text. ‘Every mark displayed in a picture is a potential carrier of meaning’ she writes.⁴ In children’s books that retell Greek myth, the details in the pictures play a crucial part in establishing the setting. Often, a text simply states that a story happened ‘long ago’, leaving the illustrations to clarify the features of this remote place. Despite diversity in illustrative style, texts depict the mythological landscape with a noteworthy level of consistency. While this might suggest overt lines of influence from one text to another, I believe that it also reveals a collective cultural understanding of the way myth looks. This stretches far beyond the genre of children’s literature, and serves as a reminder that these retellings belong to a broader framework of mythic representation. In this context, I will explore the facets of the mythic chronotope – and the way in which its physical elements reveal its underlying ideology. The ability to control the way in which myth is represented in turn prompts questions concerning who owns and controls the myths.

In the second section, I maintain that the self-consciousness of recent publications about their retelling of mythology is also reflected in their depiction of the mythic setting. Authors and illustrators engage in the process of staging the mythic past, dressing the landscape as if it were a theatrical set. Mythic characters appear arrayed in costumes that are era appropriate. The artifacts of the mythic world figure as props, at times invested with genuine power and at other moments exposed as hollow replicas. In the most brazen texts, readers are left with unsettling questions as to what is real and imaginary, genuine and fake. Expanding this territory, I then turn to the inclusion of genuine ancient artifacts, including items that reference well-known ancient objects and locations, and argue that their presence reveals a concern with the interplay between what is real and unreal, authentic and inauthentic. I will explore the implications of creating an imaginary place, borrowing details from the historical record but refashioning them into a setting that is sanitised, safe, and often, for the benefit of young children, noticeably cute. These texts have an agenda to get children into myth, and the way in which they represent the mythological landscape is crucial to the success of such a project. This Chapter confronts the complex questions surrounding the ownership of the myths, which seem to have little to do with the Greeks themselves, and implicates English-speaking writers, illustrators and publishers in acts of self-reflection.

⁴ Jane Doonan, *Looking at Pictures in Picture Books* (Gloucester: Thimble Press, 1993). p.12

The previous Chapter concluded with Rosemary Sutcliff's account of the way in which she fleshes out the 'bare bones' of a traditional narrative in her retellings. This metaphor resonates within the context of this Chapter, in which the mythic setting is fleshed out as a fully realised, if still imaginary, place. Bakhtin employs the same imagery when he writes that within a chronotope '[t]ime, as it were, thickens, *takes on flesh*, becomes artistically visible.'⁵ In the final section, I address the significance of ruins, the bones of the past, and reflect upon their slippery status not simply as signifiers of another age, but as an emblem of the passage of time.

The Mythic Landscape

What does myth look like? The stories come from such a deep, ancient place that they remain slippery, elusive and perennially difficult to pin down. Artists have struggled to give shape to the creatures and landscapes of mythology for millennia. Bernard Evslin's *Monsters of Mythology* series and Antonia Barber's *Apollo and Daphne: Masterpieces of Mythology* draw upon such traditions in using famous works of art as the illustrations.⁶ Yet while many texts are informed by the potent images created through the traditions of the West, the conception of myth is also private and deeply personal.

Jon Scieszka's *It's All Greek to Me* captures the challenge of conveying the look and feel of myth when the boys stage their school play. 'We had tried to imagine what Mount Olympus might look like when we built the set for our play,' Joe says, 'but this place was beyond our imagination.'⁷ The illustrators of children's books strive to bring this world to life, to make it appeal to a young audience who may not yet have developed concrete mental images of what myth looks like. They invest it with colour and detail, depth and dimension, rendering it a fully fleshed out place that provides a rich sensory experience. Francesca Simon's *Helping Hercules* emphasises the mythic world's olfactory elements, from 'the fresh smell of olive groves' to the 'foul stink of pitch and gas and sulphur' in the Underworld.⁸

⁵ Bakhtin. p.84 (my emphasis)

⁶ Published between 1987 and 1991, the 'Monsters of Mythology' series contains more than twenty titles, including Bernard Evslin, *Medusa* (New York: Chelsea House, 1987); *Cerberus* (New York: Chelsea House, 1987). *The Hydra* (New York: Chelsea House, 1989). See also Barber.

⁷ Scieszka. p.23

⁸ Simon. p.17, 33

Maurice Saxby has written that the 'myths of Greece, which have most influenced the Western world, reflect the pure light, the blue skies, the lofty mountains, the plains and the olive groves that shaped the lives of its people.'⁹ He argues that landscape informs the ways in which a culture's myths develop, contrasting the warmth of the Mediterranean with the harsher, grimmer Norse climate and the exotic, colourful, flamboyant aspects of the cultures to the east. Saxby's theory seems questionable, betraying a strong bias towards the classical myths, and based on observations which are both simplistic and stereotyped. Yet the topographical features which he identifies as dominating the Greek landscape and consciousness are the core elements with which illustrators draw upon to develop their vision of the mythological setting.

A chronotope, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, embodies the way in which literature depicts the idea of time and space. For Bakhtin the two categories are entirely interdependent, with neither one privileged over the other: 'Spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole.'¹⁰ The term, whose Greek etymology can be easily unpacked, was borrowed from the field of mathematics, and featured within Einstein's treatise on the theory of relativity. Bakhtin recontextualises it as a tool for literary analysis, employing it as a means of distinguishing between story genres and to expose the ideologies endorsed within different types. He begins with an analysis of ancient Romance novels, dating from between the 2nd and 6th centuries AD, and determining that they belong to the 'adventure chronotope'. These stories are characterised by a kind of stasis, in which 'nothing changes: the world remains as it was, the biographical life of the heroes does not change, their feelings do not change, people do not even age.'¹¹ Some of these aspects recall the dreamlike quality of many retellings of myth, although the overt moral agenda of such texts is often manifested in a character resolving to mend their ways.

Maria Nikolajeva has applied Bakhtin's work to books written for children. Her focus is on the magic chronotope, characterised by '[m]agic amulets, swords, invisible capes, flying carpets and other magical objects.'¹² She refers to these items as artifacts, invoking the associations of archaeological

⁹ Saxby, *Books in the Life of a Child: Bridges to Literature and Learning*. p.150-1.

¹⁰ Bakhtin. p.84

¹¹ Ibid. p.91

¹² Nikolajeva, *Children's Literature Comes of Age: Towards a New Aesthetic*. p.145 See also "Fairy Tale and Fantasy: From Archaic to Postmodern." p.141

relics from a specific time and space. It is my belief that the mythological chronotope, if we can engender such a term, shares some of the elements associated with the magic chronotope, but also has its own quite specific collection of artifacts. Some are overtly associated with the classical age, but as we shall go on to see, other aspects are more oblique.

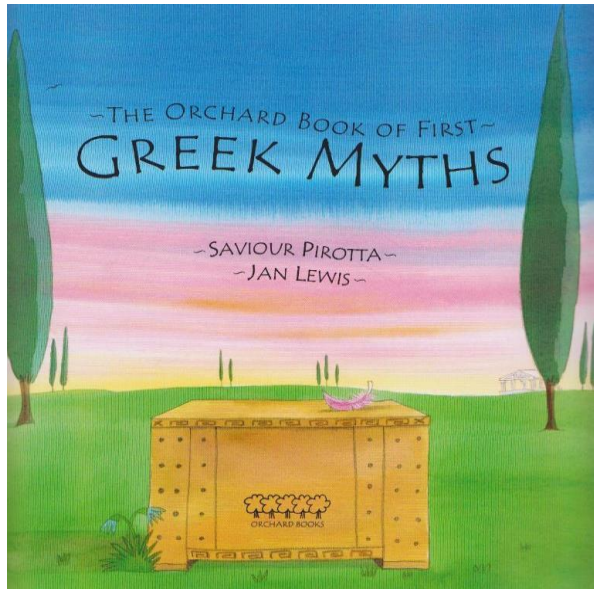


Figure 10: Saviour Pirotta's *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths* (2003) illustrated by Jan Lewis, p.3

The title page of Saviour Pirotta's *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths*, illustrated by Jan Lewis, has already been studied for its depiction of the treasure chest of stories and its correspondence to Pandora's Box, but here I want to draw attention to its representation of the world of myth as an idyllic, natural environment (Figure 10). Throughout Lewis' illustrations the mythic landscape features gently rolling green hills, dotted with slender trees. The sky is blue and cloudless, the grass green and healthy. There are small creatures everywhere: chickens, birds and lizards add to the whimsical

appeal of the pictures. The place has a timeless, dreamlike quality to it, yet the antiquity of the setting is persistently clarified by the presence of a classical temple, visible on almost every page. Some of them appear to be in ruins. These structures do not represent particular buildings, but conform to a common, standardised shape, drawing upon the very essence of classical architecture in their arrangement of columns and pediments. Sarah Annes Brown has described white marble as promoting a 'mediated version' of classicism which has little to do with the reality of the ancient world.¹³

Brown's notion of mediating the ancient past is also a preoccupation of Charles Martindale, who has stressed that 'we are not the direct inheritors of antiquity.'¹⁴ He conceives of the act of reception not

¹³ The fact that in antiquity many marble structures and statues were painted in bright colours is easy to forget in light of the power of the image of stark white marble. Brown. p.435

¹⁴ Charles Martindale, "Thinking through Reception," in *Classics and the Uses of Reception*, ed. Charles Martindale and Richard F. Thomas (Malden: Blackwell, 2006). p.4

as a single moment in relation to an event from the ancient world, but rather as an ongoing process that is continually being redefined. For him, the points along the way between antiquity and the present are just as interesting as the beginning and end. The way in which the mythic setting is depicted within children's books conforms to Martindale's theory. The world of myth is an imaginary place, constructed out of the personal and cultural fantasies of its creators. The world created by Pirotta and Lewis resembles that of historical Ancient Greece, yet it is



Figure 11: Krystyna Turska's *Pegasus* (1970), n.pag.

free of signifiers tying it to a particular temporal period or geographic location. It liberally borrows the symbols and details associated with the broadest definition of the ancient classical world. Lewis' work forms a kind of architectural pastiche, in which the white dome-shaped houses of the Cyclades are reconstructed inland and the city of Troy is topped with the red tiled roofs of the Byzantine era.¹⁵ The characters are clothed in loose flowing togas and leather sandals, and to the eye of a pedant, Jason's armour appears more Roman than Greek in style.

For some conservative critics, such anachronisms are enough to ruin the magic of the vision. Martindale notes that it is part of the pathology of the classicist to seek out an unadulterated version of 'the-past-as-it-really-was',¹⁶ but for him, the possibility of getting at Homer (for example) 'untouched by any taint of modernity' is a deluded desire.¹⁷ While it is tempting to identify specific inaccuracies in the work, it is more constructive to note that Pirotta and Lewis appear to be striving to create a vision of the ancient past that appears authentic, even while relying on an extremely broad definition of what that era actually connotes. The slippery origins of myth render it harder to trace than any other form of historical recreation. Martindale believes that any effort to get back to an original, to strip back the accretions that attach themselves to a text over time, is doomed. This notion of stripping back the layers of a text's reception, responds to the recurring metaphor of fleshing out a

¹⁵ Pirotta, *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths*. p.25, 48-9

¹⁶ Martindale. p.2

¹⁷ Ibid. p.7

mythic narrative from its barest bones. Yet as Martindale concludes, ‘what would be left might turn out to be rather evidently impoverished.’¹⁸



Figure 12: Pat Posner's *Gods and Goddesses from the Greek Myths* (2003) illustrated by Olwyn Whelan, p.15

In his essay ‘The Romans in Films’, Roland Barthes identifies signifiers of ‘the label of Roman-ness’ in Mankiewicz’s famous film *Julius Caesar*, noting that all of the characters have hairstyles with fringes, and all, with the exception of Caesar himself, are very sweaty.¹⁹ Some of the signifiers of myth are equally arbitrary. As we have already noted, Lewis’ idyllic natural landscapes are dotted with tall, tapering trees, perhaps resembling cypresses. Strikingly, very similar shaped trees appear in the varied artwork of Krystyna Turska in *Pegasus* (Figure 11), Olwyn Whelan in Pat Posner’s *Gods and Goddesses from the Greek Myths* (Figure 12) and Amanda Hall in Barbara Baumgartner’s *Good as Gold* (Figure 13).²⁰ Their recurrence

marks them as a quintessential mythic tree. While the possibility of a direct line of influence from one artist to another cannot be ruled out, it seems more likely that a more oblique kind of referencing is at work, one which draws upon a collective vision of what the world of myth looks like. This is testament to the strength of the mythic tradition, linking not only textual treatments but also visual representations.

While some texts seek to cast the mythic realm as a natural idyll, others emphasise its foreignness, drawing upon the appeal of the exotic. In Rosemary Wells’ *Max and Ruby’s First Greek Myth*, the images of the ancient world are more detailed and vibrantly coloured than those set in the modern world. The shift from the contemporary frame story about the rabbits Max and Ruby into the retelling of the myth of Pandora is also marked by the way in which each illustration is framed. While the

¹⁸ Ibid. p.12

¹⁹ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972). p.26-7.

²⁰ Krystyna Turska, *Pegasus* (London: Franklin Watts, 1970); Posner; Baumgartner.

modern story is accompanied by illustrations enclosed within a single black line, those set in the ancient world feature coloured borders with recurring patterns of waves, olive branches and other designs which evoke the style of geometric pottery. This change in framing style, including a shift from plain white paper to pale blue, functions as a literal embodiment of the notion of this story within a story, and at the same time underscores a distinction between the mundane contemporary world and the vividness of myth. In a deliberate anachronism no doubt inserted to amuse adult readers, Pandora's mother rewards her for her apparent obedience and good behaviour with a trip to the movies. This detail unsettles the otherwise consistent setting, replete with the standard signifiers of the ancient world: columns, grape vines and togas.

For the time travelling boys in Jon Scieszka's *It's All Greek to Me* the mythic world is a place 'farther and stranger than we'd ever gone before'.²¹ But although the setting initially appears utterly alien, as the boys' journey progresses they discover that it is actually less strange than it first appeared. Olympus is furnished with the domestic features of an ordinary home, and despite their special powers, the gods are flawed like ordinary human beings. The boys realise that the goddess Hestia sounds just like their mums do.²² Significantly, it is their knowledge of myth which renders the place more familiar to them. Having been studying the stories at school, they find that they are able to recognise the terrain and identify the gods from their accoutrements. Their ability to survive depends upon re-enacting the feats of the heroes they have read about, and they can only return to their own time when they have set the mythic world to rights.

John Stephens has registered this dynamic between strangeness and familiarity within children's historical fiction, a genre which shares common features with retellings of myth. He writes:

The forming impulse of historical fiction might thus be said to consist of two contrary impulses: on the one hand, in order to mediate between past and present it will seek strategies by which to render the strangeness of the past familiar; on the other, in order to construct the literary illusion of an older discourse, it will seek to make its encoding discourse seem in some ways strange or 'other'.²³

²¹ Scieszka. p.9

²² Ibid. p.28

²³ Stephens. p.202-3

Chapter Five

The relationship between the past and the present is a crucial preoccupation in many texts, and the following Chapter will have more to say on this important aspect. Mythic retellings are motivated to establish the relevance of myth within the modern age, and highlighting its familiar elements helps to convey this message. Yet at the same time, the otherworldliness of myth contributes to its appeal. It offers readers the promise of an escape to another place, one that is not merely remote in time, but also has the allure of an imaginary realm.

Myth as Performance

The mythic world is not a real place. Though the illustrations convey its depth and detail, the setting remains imaginary. The self-consciousness of retellings about the way in which they engage with myth extends to the way in which the characters dress and move about in the landscape. In the next part of this Chapter I will argue that a tradition exists in which the mythological setting is constructed as a kind of performance involving a variety of sets, costumes and props. In this theatrical configuration, readers become implicated as the audience for the performance.

In Juliet Sharman Burke's *Stories from the Stars: Greek Myths of the Zodiac*, one of Jackie Morris' illustrations shows the goddess Demeter, her lap full of fresh produce, gazing out at her daughter as she wanders in a fertile field (Figure 14). As Demeter beholds this lush landscape, and a sinister Hades peers up from below, in turn the reader is engaged in a further act of looking. Although the vibrant colour palette is very different, Demeter's stance echoes the full profile poses shown on archaic pottery. The viewer's gaze is drawn to her eye, starkly rendered, which in turn directs our attention towards Persephone in the field. The Corinthian columns positioned on the far left and right of the image act as signifiers of the mythic



Figure 14: Juliet Sharman Burke's *Stories from the Stars* (1996) illustrated by Jackie Morris, p.40

chronotope. Together with the theatrical red curtain draped across the top, they form the pillars of a kind of set through which this mythological scene, so focused on the implications of looking, can itself be viewed.

Francesca Simon's *Helping Hercules* employs the tropes of theatricality more literally by casting her main character, Susan, in a school play about the Trojan War. As her classmates bicker over who is beautiful enough to play Helen, and the teacher 'carried on chattering about props and costumes',²⁴

²⁴ Simon. p.42

Susan finds herself transported from her modern classroom into the mythic world, and playing an actual role in the Judgment of Paris. The slippage between modern characters playing in myth and author's playing with it will be explored in greater detail in the following Chapter, but in this context it is worth registering the use of the school play as a motif for representing one way in which myth is utilised in the contemporary age. It highlights the importance of classical mythology within the classroom, and also demonstrates the versatility of the material, that children can rewrite, stage, and perform myth for themselves.

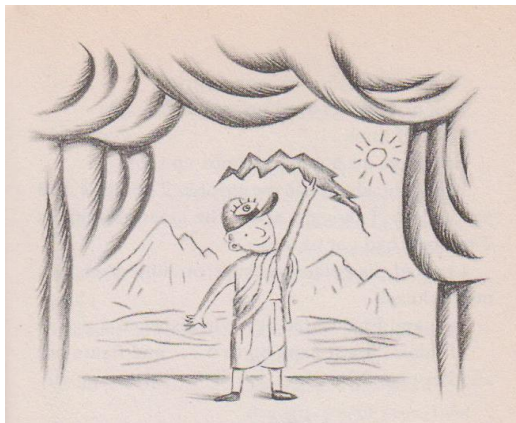


Figure 15: Jon Scieszka's *It's All Greek to Me* (1999) illustrated by Lane Smith, p.65

The same motif figures in Scieszka's *It's All Greek to Me* when Joe, Fred and Sam find themselves in myth when their school play comes to life. The students have been involved in every part of the preproduction process, from assisting their music teacher to prepare the script (as a result of her bias, the play's underlying message is that music is the answer for everything), to designing the sets, props and costumes. Each member of the Time Warp Trio has a starring role – Fred is cast as a Cyclops, with a single eye pinned to his cap and armed with a tinfoil-covered lightning bolt (Figure 15), Sam is Orpheus, carrying a rudimentary lyre fashioned out of a bent stick and some rubber bands, and Joe is handsome Paris, bearing a gold spray-painted plastic apple. True to the myth, this final prop triggers discord among the three Olympian goddesses who lay claim to it, but in a satisfying reversal, the apple ends up being transformed into a symbol of Olympian harmony.

As the house lights go down and the curtain goes up, the boys find themselves not in the opening act of their staged, safe version of their play set in the Underworld, but in the real Hades, facing the real Cerberus. Scieszka's description of the Underworld draws upon the established tropes of the place for well-versed readers to identify. They pass 'a guy rolling a huge rock up a hill' and 'another guy reaching for fruit and water that kept moving away.'²⁵ The fact that these references to Hades'

²⁵ Scieszka. p.12

renowned inmates, Sisyphus and Tantalus, remain clear even while they are anonymous, highlights the strength of the mythic tradition.

Upon meeting Zeus, the boys realise that the austere, 'all powerful Zeus you read about in Greek myths' had been replaced by the bumbling, incompetent Zeus from their irreverent, wise-cracking play.²⁶ *The Book* has sent them into their own play, and their revisions threaten to permanently alter the course of the mythological tradition. When the monsters converge on Olympus and attempt to wrest control from the Olympians, Sam fears that 'all the stories of the Greek myths will be changed'.²⁷ As some scholars have recognised, it is hard to pin Scieszka down – on the one hand he is promoting the sanctity of the mythic tradition and the importance of holding true to its original form, while on the other he himself has created a radical, original, and very silly story set within the world of myth.²⁸ Using the central motif of performance, he thoroughly blurs any clear-cut distinction between what is real and what isn't.

The props carried by the boys transform from harmless replicas (such as when Zeus hurls Fred's cardboard thunderbolt at Typhon, only for it to bounce off ineffectually), to being invested with the genuine power of the objects they are modelled on. Although it is merely a piece of spray-painted plastic, Joe's golden apple has the power to divide (and ultimately unify) the Olympian goddesses. Similarly, when Sam's rubber band lyre is given to Apollo (who, in an echo of the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, has never encountered such an instrument before), the instrument produces such beautiful music that the gods and monsters cease fighting one another and join together in a final dance number.

Ultimately, the text's message seems to be that myth is something that is fun to play with, and that readers are encouraged to join the game. At the back of the book is a list of the main gods and monsters, complete with witty annotations. This is standard practice in many retellings, but unusually, this list is entitled 'Cast', and precedes another section with the heading 'Make Your Own Greek Mythology Props', featuring instructions on how to craft a lyre, a thunderbolt, and a golden apple out of everyday items. There is also a web address supplied, where a copy of the play *The Myth of Power*,

²⁶ Ibid. p.16

²⁷ Ibid. p.56

²⁸ Wilkie. p.135-6

written by Scieszka for his daughter's grade four class, can be downloaded. Unfortunately, this link is no longer available.

The implications of these addenda are very interesting. They form an explicit invitation to readers to enact their own mythological performances, armed with handmade props and fitted out, like Joe and his friends, in bed-sheet togas. Though it cannot be deliberate, the broken internet link actually allows for greater creativity in developing a unique mythological narrative than if the script was readily available. Like the countless ancient texts and artifacts that have been lost through the course of history, Scieszka's lost play provides possibilities for new ways of engaging with the mythic past.

Ancient Artifacts

One means in which texts add legitimacy to their representation of the mythic world is through referencing ancient artworks in their illustrations. In addition to fostering direct connections with the artistic traditions of the past, such details help to familiarise young readers with the look and style of ancient artifacts. This section will explore the implications of genuine, world famous artifacts being located in unexpected settings in the contemporary world.

Amanda Hall's representation of Midas in Barbara Baumgartner's *Good as Gold*, depicts the king in full profile (*Figure 16*). His pose, together with his elaborately styled beard and his orange and black robes, recalls the iconographic style of archaic pottery. The connection is underscored by the presence of a trio of red and black figure vessels, overflowing with golden treasures, on display around the room. Such details convey the message that these items, located today in the context of museum display cabinets, were once used in ordinary, domestic ways.

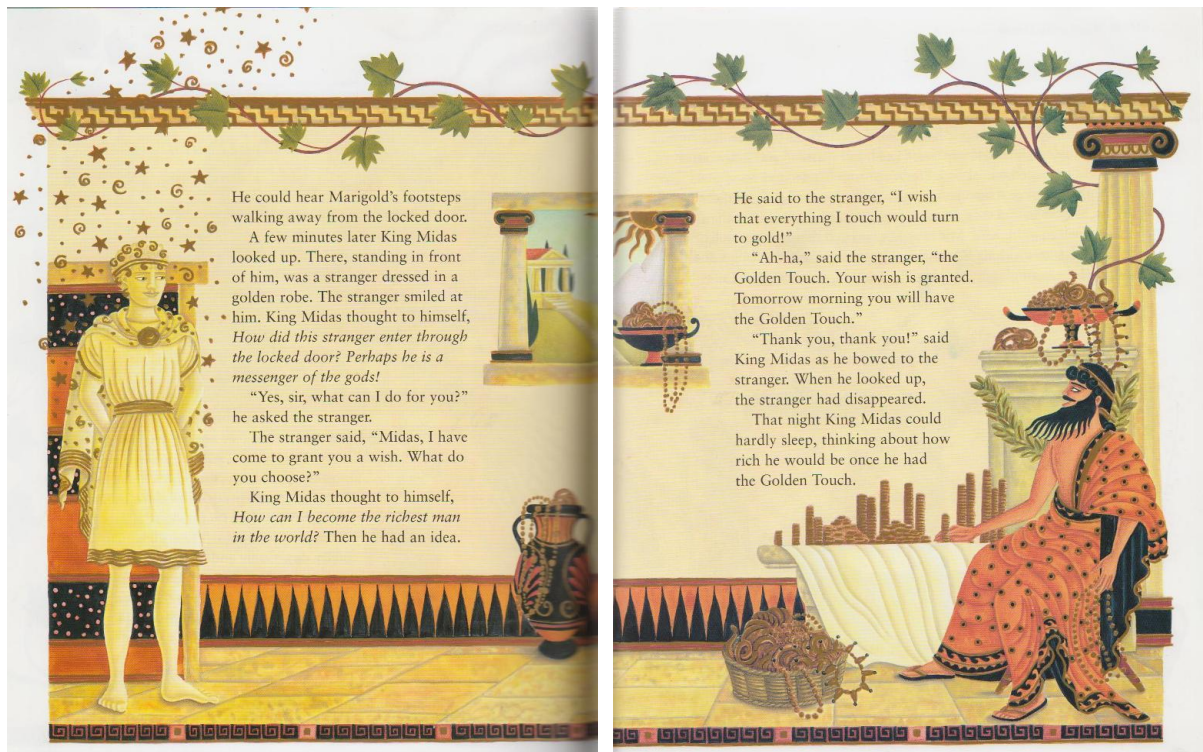


Figure 16: Barbara Baumgartner's *Good as Gold* (1998), illustrated by Amanda Hall, p.38-9

More pottery is on display in one of Jan Lewis' illustrations of the story of Pandora in Pirotta's *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths* (Figure 17). On her left is a drinking cup, and on the right stands a large storage vessel featuring a black-figure design of a warrior brandishing a spear and shield. Its design recalls Exekias' depiction of Achilles slaying the Amazon Penthesileia, but it is not a direct reproduction of this renowned piece. Similarly, the shape of the vessel is close to that of an amphora, but the neck is too narrow and the handles are in the wrong place. Although she has drawn upon the traditions of representation, Lewis has ended up revealing her own conception of a quintessential Ancient Greek vase.

Rendered in Lewis' naive style, this depiction of Pandora is noteworthy for her fresh-faced, open countenance. For someone about to unleash evil on the world, she does not appear especially malevolent. Nor, it must be noted, does

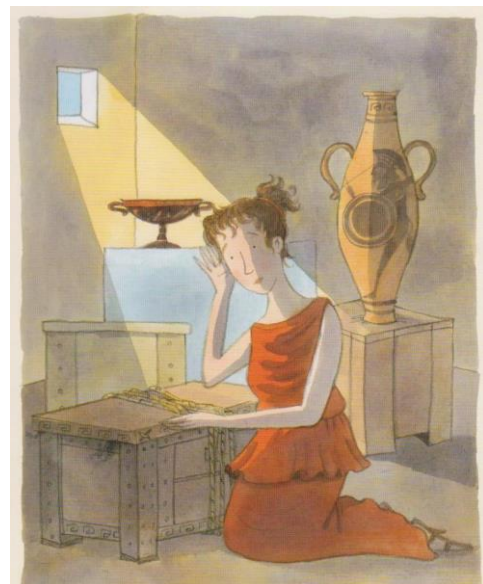


Figure 17: Saviour Pirotta's *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths* (2003) illustrated by Jan Lewis, p.10

she seem particularly Greek. Where other texts clearly draw upon ancient iconographic traditions in imagining their characters, so that many of them bear a resemblance to the people on red or black-figure pottery, it is clear that Lewis has another agenda in creating her vision of the characters of myth. This depiction of Pandora characterises her as generically white Anglo-Saxon. In this way she is appropriated, and her story along with her, by the Western English-speaking world.

Marcia Williams' comic strip version of Homer's epics *The Iliad and the Odyssey* also references the muted colour scheme of ancient pottery.²⁹ The design of the endpapers is reminiscent of the relief on the body of the Mykonos pithos, showing rows of warriors engaged in single combat. Columns with ionic capitals form a border around each frame, creating a tidy window through which to perceive each tableau. Interestingly, the decisiveness of the Greek victory shown in the scenes of slaughter on the ancient vessel is challenged in Williams' endpapers. On the left hand page the warriors in red armour consistently triumph over their enemies armed in black, while on the facing page the situation is reversed, so that the men in black are victorious.

Kathryn Hewitt's *Midas and the Golden Touch* features lavish illustrations that are dotted with anachronisms and incongruous details.³⁰ The walls of the palace are hung with renowned paintings by Rembrandt and Vermeer. Midas' storeroom contains an array of gilded treasures, including a bust of Tutankhamen, the goose who lays golden eggs, and the Holy Grail. A golden cash register and piggy bank stand out as signifiers of Midas' greed. Some items in the collection, like Apuleius' golden ass and the golden apple of discord, reference other classical myths, while others allude to fairy tales and mythological traditions from other cultures. This treasure trove brings together famous golden objects from throughout the storytelling traditions of the Western world. A sophisticated cultural knowledge is necessary in order to grasp their significance, and it is likely that many young readers would be unable to appreciate their meaning. This is an example of children's literature operating on multiple discursive levels, with messages intended to entertain and amuse adult readers. Maria Nikolajeva refers to a 'double set of codes' in which a children's text communicates dual messages to the different audiences of child and adult.³¹

²⁹ Williams.

³⁰ Kathryn Hewitt, *King Midas and the Golden Touch* (San Diego: Harcourt Children's Books, 1987).

³¹ Nikolajeva, *From Mythic to Linear: Time in Children's Literature*. p.263

The line between archaeology and myth is further blurred in Ian Serraillier's *Heracles the Strong*.³² When Heracles visits Crete, Minos takes him on a tour of his newly constructed palace. 'He took him through the halls and galleries and showed him the frescoes and wall-paintings – of flower gardens, of a Prince of the Lilies – which the artists were still working on. Heracles liked best the picture of young men of the court somersaulting over the horns of wild bulls, for they seemed to him full of the joy of life.'³³ Serraillier places the mythical figure Heracles within the context of the treasures uncovered at Knossos by Arthur Evans. This simultaneously lends the authority of history to the story, and imbues the renowned archaeological site with the magic of myth. This exchange becomes yet more complicated by Evans' infamous fanciful reconstructions at Knossos, including the Prince of the Lilies fresco referred to in the story.

In Ruins

I began this Chapter with Betty Middleton-Sandford's depiction of Delphi from Roger Lancelyn Green's *Tales of the Greek Heroes*, reflecting on the powerful impact that image had on me as a child, and how my own personal conception of what myth looks like has grown out of that text, my first encounter with Greek mythology. This opening visual shows an idealised Delphi as it is today (or at least, as it was in the mid-twentieth century when Green's text was first released). As I said in the Introduction, I don't think my eight-year-old self registered that there was any difference between this apparently realistic image and the rest of Middleton-Sandford's illustrations, which depict the gods, heroes, and other fabulous creatures from myth as if they were as real as the ruins of Delphi.

Ruins symbolise the passing of time.³⁴ Yet they are not always emblematic of an era long gone. In the 1963 film *Jason and the Argonauts*, featuring the stop-motion animation of Ray Harryhausen, Jason battles the Harpies within the ruined structure of a classical temple.³⁵ Like the white marble structures which populate the illustrations examined in this Chapter, this temple acts as an emblem of the

³² Ian Serraillier, *Heracles the Strong* (Melbourne: Hamish Hamilton, 1971; 1980).

³³ *Ibid.* p.47

³⁴ Their mystique has been explored by Christopher Woodward, *In Ruins* (London: Vintage, 2002). and Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004). pp.92-130

³⁵ Helen Lovatt notes that this film has had a 'significant influence' on children's retellings of the Jason story. Lovatt, "Gutting the *Argonautica*? How to Make Jason and the Argonauts Suitable for Children." p.22

classical age, in which myth borrows from history to give itself clarity. Peter Fritzsche has written that in Western Europe, ruins came to signify ‘the process of destruction, conquest, and renewal, and the fluidity of history in general.’³⁶ Harryhausen has described the process of location scouting whereby they located the quintessential Greek temple in Sicily.³⁷ This notion of ruins already existing in the mythic world unsettles any clear cut distinction between the past and the present. It calls to mind the famous scene from Lucan’s *Pharsalia* in which Caesar makes a pilgrimage to the long-abandoned site of Troy, only to find that the ruins themselves are in ruins; *etiam periere ruinae*.³⁸

In the edition of Green’s work released in the mid-1990s, Middleton-Sandford’s simple sketches were replaced by a much darker set of illustrations by the graphic novelist Alan Longford. There can be no doubt this was the publishing team’s attempt to contemporise a text then almost four decades old, and to engage and appeal to a new generation of young readers. Yet it is interesting to reflect on how this dramatic change in illustrative style reframes Green’s written text, in particular, the lofty excerpts from renowned Western poets retained at times at the beginning of each section. As Chapter Seven will reveal, Green’s words have remained unaltered through the release of eight new editions, including several in the course of the last few years. In *Six Myths of our Time* Marina Warner expresses the often-made point that myths change ‘in relation to the social structure with which they interact.’³⁹ Green’s work highlights a complex case in which some aspects of the text remain a constant while others undergo transformation. As Martindale would point out, ‘texts mean differently in different situations.’⁴⁰

³⁶ Fritzsche. p.125

³⁷ Ray Harryhausen and Tony Dalton, *An Animated Life* (London: Aurum Press, 2003, 2009). p.153

³⁸ Lucan, *Pharsalia*, trans. J.D. Duff (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1928). 9.969

³⁹ Warner, *Six Myths of Our Time: Managing Monsters*. p.xiii

⁴⁰ Martindale. p.4

Conclusion

This Chapter has shown that the mythic setting is grounded in paradox. It is a place both real and yet imaginary, ancient but also timeless, elaborately detailed and yet two-dimensional. The mythic chronotope has its own set of distinct features, yet draws freely upon other genres, incorporating elements both magical and medieval. Ultimately, the creation of a mythic setting is about bringing the world of myth to life for today's readers. The relationship between past and present remains unstable, emphasising both the remoteness of the mythic world as well as its familiar, ordinary features. These contradictions aside, there is striking consistency in the way that the world of myth is represented across different texts, suggesting that powerful traditions of influence are at play in the way illustrators depict this imaginary realm. It is clear that these extend far beyond the genre of children's literature. My own childhood experience highlights that the depiction of myth can have a lasting impact.

For the most part, the texts develop a vision of the mythic past that is cute, appealing and safe. While they do not deny the violence that is central in so many of the stories, the illustrations reframe it in a way that marks it as unreal. A select few works do delve into the darker side of the stories, such as Alan Lee's illustrations in Rosemary Sutcliff's *Black Ships Before Troy*.⁴¹ Lee, who is renowned for his work on editions of Tolkien's work and their cinematic adaptations, depicts the human cost of war in confronting, graphic detail.

There is a strong preference for framed scenes, allowing readers a window through which to behold antiquity as a kind of performance involving sets, costumes and props. A number of texts engage with the theme of the staging of mythology, including the ever self-aware Jon Scieszka. While promoting the inviolability of the mythological tradition, he ultimately invites his readers to participate in new forms of myth-making, employing the most mundane, everyday materials.

This Chapter has highlighted that it is important not to consider the representation of myth within the context of children's literature in isolation. The way in which we envisage the mythic landscape is

⁴¹ Sutcliff, *Black Ships before Troy*.

Chapter Five

shaped by a myriad of influences, and it is clear that there is significant cross-pollination between different textual and art forms.

Chapter Six: Past and Present

In 'Tell me a picture: Stories in Museums' curator Frances Sword describes how she asks the children who visit her antiquities collection whether they think time is 'a solid, a liquid, or a gas?'¹ This strange question provokes young visitors to consider their own connection with the ancient objects on display, and the myriad ways in which the past influences, infiltrates and impacts upon the present. Sword's anecdote serves as a reminder of the difficulties in pinning down a concept as amorphous as *time*. Although at first it seems to have no obvious affinity with any of the three states of matter, it is in fact possible to conceive of time as having distinct physical properties and characteristics. Like a liquid, time seeps and trickles and flows relentlessly onward, and like most gases it is invisible to the naked eye. Time can also take on concrete form in clocks and watches and other timepieces.

This Chapter will explore how the concept of time is represented in children's retellings of Greek myth. It will argue that the nature of time is an important preoccupation within many retellings, both those written for the very young and more mature readers. Although Maria Nikolajeva has claimed that the notion of time as a metaphysical or philosophical concept is 'seldom touched upon directly in novels for children,'² I will demonstrate that in fact a significant number of mythic retellings do engage with this complex subject matter. In playing around with time, its limits and possibilities, these texts consistently seek to reveal how ancient myth remains relevant within a modern context.

The first part of this Chapter will address the ways in which mythic retellings situate the relationship between past and the present. As we saw in the previous Chapter, the world of myth is often cast as a setting impossibly distant from the familiar world of the present, and the chronology of mythic time heightens this remoteness. The stories of myth take place in a landscape both far away and long ago. Yet while some texts emphasise this distance between the mythic and contemporary landscapes to heighten the story's appeal, others stress continuity, drawing attention to the ways in which myth has endured into the present. The aetiological function of myth is well established, and in revealing myth

¹ Frances Sword, "Tell Me a Picture: Stories in Museums," in *Tales, Tellers and Texts*, ed. Gabrielle Cliff Hodges, Mary Jane Drummond, and Morag Styles (New York: Cassell, 2000). p.97

² Nikolajeva, *From Mythic to Linear: Time in Children's Literature*. p.153

as a source for today's environmental and cultural phenomena, many texts highlight the enduring power of these stories.³

Building on these foundations, in the second section I will address what is prolific enough to be considered a subgenre of mythic retellings: time slip stories, in which characters from the contemporary era travel into the world of myth.⁴ These narratives allow readers to satisfy vicariously their longing to come into close contact with myth. I will address our cultural nostalgia for other times and worlds, and question whether such desires are experienced by children as well as adults. At the same time, these stories regularly explore the theme of the sanctity of myth, and the implications of a character intervening or interfering in an established narrative form. These issues take on added levels of significance when the authors' own interference in the narrative is taken into account. Although a traditionalist position tends to be upheld, some authors seem aware that they are guilty of their own form of narrative intervention in writing the books in the first place.

In an exception to the notion that children's literature does not tend to confront such complex philosophical territory, some texts do actively question what time itself means. The final section of this Chapter focuses on Patricia Miles' *Gods in Winter*, a young adult novel that remained extremely obscure until being rereleased a decade ago.⁵ This text experiments with the idea that the myths endlessly play themselves out in different contexts, including within the present. Employing Gérard Genette's understanding of the iterative frequency, I will read this text in terms of its unique chronology, arguing that Miles has reframed the story of Persephone's abduction as a story about the endurance of myth through the practice of storytelling.

³ Powell. p.112

⁴ Ann Lawson Lucas, ed. *The Presence of the Past in Children's Literature* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Press, 2003). p.xix

⁵ Miles.

Long, Long Ago

The opening words of a narrative are critically important in setting the scene for what follows. In the case of children's retellings of myth, the introduction of a story regularly highlights the chronological context.⁶ Using variations of the expression 'long ago', numerous retellings underscore the remoteness of the mythological setting from the present day of the contemporary reader. In stressing this temporal distance, the mystique and foreignness of the world of myth is emphasised. Stephens and McCallum have written of the 'strange alterities' of the mythic setting, and the way in which these exotic landscapes appeal to young readers.⁷ Elisabeth Cook references the widespread use of these phrases when she writes:

Once upon a time, and not so very far away or long ago, there would have been no need to give reasons for reading to children the stories that are commonly known as fairy tales, legends and myths.⁸

Cook is self-conscious about the changes in the status of the corpus of traditional tales within children's literature, framing her remark within the rather hackneyed phrases with which the stories so often begin.

Saviour Pirotta's *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths* begins with the words '[l]ong ago, when the world was new.'⁹ Echoing the opening phrase of Nathaniel Hawthorne's version of the story of Pandora - 'when this old world was in its tender infancy'¹⁰ - this introduction connects the youth of the world with the age of the target audience of these stories. Maurice Saxby has written that '[t]o read the Greek myths is to experience the wonder of the morning of the world.'¹¹ The notion of mythic time as innocent and unsullied is appealing, evoking in the reader nostalgia for a lost age, impossibly long ago.¹²

⁶ Lukens, Smith, and Coffel. p.82

⁷ Stephens and McCallum. p.62

⁸ Cook. p.1

⁹ Pirotta, *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths*. p.8

¹⁰ Hawthorne. p.45

¹¹ Saxby, *Books in the Life of a Child: Bridges to Literature and Learning*. p.151

¹² Peter Fritzsche writes that the modern era has a 'passionate longing for the things of the past.' Fritzsche. p.1

In her introduction, Jane Yolen's *Wings* supplies a geographic specification, beginning '[o]nce in Ancient Greece...'¹³ As the previous Chapter revealed, in representing the world of myth authors and illustrators draw freely upon elements of the classical world, incorporating them into an ahistorical pastiche that is distinct from any specific historical epoch. Yolen's story blends myth and history, with Dennis Nolan's illustrations featuring detailed images of classical and Minoan architecture, as well as fantastical renderings of the Olympian gods amongst the clouds.

The phrase 'long ago' is akin to the 'once upon a time' of fairy tales, and in fact this famous opening is employed by Rosemary Wells in the opening of *Max and Ruby's First Greek Myth: Pandora's Box*: 'Once upon a time there was a little girl named Pandora.'¹⁴ The words signify the beginning of the folktale discourse. In spite of the textual form of the words upon the printed page, the phrase lends itself to being read aloud. In the case of *Max and Ruby*, the figure of the storyteller is invoked not only through Ruby's performance of the story for her younger brother, but by extension through the figure of the external reader. In being marketed to such a young audience, this text implies an adult storyteller to mediate and perform the story.

Juliet Sharman Burke's *Stories from the Stars: Greek Myths of the Zodiac* employs a variety of phrases to emphasise the distance of the mythic setting from the present day.¹⁵ The story of Theseus is given a chronological framework with the opening 'Many years ago',¹⁶ while some of the other stories in the collection contain more complex descriptions of mythic time, starting '[b]efore time began, life was very different from what it is today'¹⁷ and '[i]n the very beginning of time'.¹⁸ In concentrating on the myths which have influenced the Zodiac calendar, this collection emphasises the way in which the ancient world has influenced the modern. Numerous retellings cast the myths as the source of aetiologies – whether astronomical, environmental or cultural. The phrase 'to this day' is almost as common as 'long ago'.

¹³ Yolen.

¹⁴ Wells, *Max and Ruby's First Greek Myth: Pandora's Box*. n.pag.

¹⁵ Sharman.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p.17

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p.49

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p.63

In this way, some of the texts which begin with 'long ago' end up promoting the idea that the world of myth continues to resonate and impact upon us today. James Riordan's *Jason and the Golden Fleece* concludes 'Yet that is not quite the end of the story.'¹⁹ The text suggests that Jason is the mythic prototype for other renowned adventurers, including Magellan, Columbus and Thor Heyerdahl. Kay E. Vandergrift has written that '[t]he power of story is its potential to reach out over time and distance to make connections that tie human beings together in a recognition of their common humanity.'²⁰ While some texts strive to emphasise the remoteness of the time of myth in an effort to highlight its exotic appeal, it is also common to stress the common territory between the mythic past and the present.

Travelling into Myth

Within the corpus of mythic retellings, there are numerous stories in which characters, usually children, journey from the modern age into the world of myth. This subgenre has burgeoned in the last two decades, with at least five texts - Jon Scieszka's *It's All Greek to Me*, Francesca Simon's *Helping Hercules*, Alan Gibbons' *Shadow of the Minotaur*, Charlie Carter's *Battle Boy: Destroy Troy*, and Ian Trevaskis' *Hopscotch: the Medusa Stone* all featuring this premise. These works find a counterpoint in stories in which characters from myth have survived into the modern day (such as the Percy Jackson series and Marie Phillips' adult novel *Gods Behaving Badly*). Like the more traditional mythic retellings studied in the previous section, these texts reflect on the relationship between the past and present. Many draw upon the narrative conventions of the time travel genre to explore the limits and possibilities of what you can do with, and in, myth. By consistently ensuring that modern day characters must return to their own time, the texts appear to uphold a conservative stance, yet this is not always reflected in the behaviour of the author, who takes significant liberties with the mythic tradition in formulating such a narrative.

Critics hold different opinions on the appeal of these kinds of tales. Paul Nahin believes that texts involving travel through time hold a particular fascination for young children. For him, such stories respond to a collective 'longing for the past...[and] the sweet pleasure most people get from

¹⁹ Jason Riordan, *Jason and the Golden Fleece* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2003). p.60

²⁰ Kay E. Vandergrift, *Child and Story: The Literary Connection* (New York: Neal-Schuman, 1980). p.278

experiencing almost any recreation of times gone by.²¹ The desire to see what the landscapes and characters of myth look like, and to play an active part in the stories themselves, is clearly an aspect of what motivates the production of these narratives. In depicting young characters encountering the world of myth first hand, these stories allow the readers who identify with them, to satisfy their own longings vicariously. Taking a contrasting position, Nikolajeva argues that nostalgia for the past is in fact largely a phenomenon experienced by adults. She finds it 'doubtful that young readers will be seized by the same longing for the times gone by, since they have not experienced them, either personally or through literature.'²² Nikolajeva's point serves as a reminder of the dangers of conflating adult perspectives with those of children, and that this project does not have insight into the feelings of actual young readers. Even so, the recurrence of time travel storylines does seem to indicate that these narratives do resonate in some way with readers of all ages.

As the previous Chapter demonstrated, travelling into myth is not exactly the same as travelling through time. In Scieszka's *It's All Greek to Me*, Joe makes the distinction when he addresses the sceptic among the regular readers of the Time Warp books: 'I can just hear one of you smart guys out there saying, "How can you travel into Greek mythology? I thought *The Book* could only travel through time."²³ The world in which myth takes place is not the same as Ancient Greece of any historical epoch, but authors and illustrators borrow freely from all parts of Ancient Greek history, from the Bronze Age to the Byzantine era. So while the world of myth is a place 'farther and stranger than we'd ever gone before',²⁴ according to the veteran time travellers in Scieszka's story, this and the other texts have much in common with other time slip stories, drawing upon many of the same narrative conventions.

These stories tend to feature magic as an agent of time travel – as opposed to the time machines of the science fiction genre – although both *Destroy Troy* and *Shadow of the Minotaur* feature forms of modern technology as the catalyst. In other cases, seemingly ordinary objects - a ring, a coin, or a book - are invested with special powers. Nikolajeva has noted that these talismans are frequently gifts

²¹ Paul J. Nahin, *Time Machines: Time Travel in Physics, Metaphysics and Science Fiction* (New York: American Institute of Physics, 1993).

²² Nikolajeva, *From Mythic to Linear: Time in Children's Literature*. p.22

²³ Scieszka. p.5

²⁴ Ibid. p.9

from older relatives, with the implication that these family members have had their own adventures using the magic objects.²⁵ In both *Helping Hercules* and *It's All Greek to Me*, the magic object is a gift from an uncle. In Scieszka's story, *The Book* comes from Joe's namesake Uncle Joe, with their common name strengthening their connection as travellers through time and space.

Susan's coin in *Helping Hercules* is an authentic relic with the words TI ETHELEIS – Ancient Greek for 'What do you wish?' - transcribed upon its face. But after running a test of its capabilities, Susan comes to realise that 'it wasn't a wishing coin, but a Greek time-travel coin'.²⁶ In spite of the open-endedness of the question it poses, the coin only has the power to transport its owner to the time from which it comes. The other side of the coin displays a different image each time Susan travels into myth, in accordance with the story she is about to enter. When she first meets Hercules, she shows him the coin with his image on it.

'It's me,' he said at last. 'I'm famous. Of course my muscles are much bigger than this picture shows but it's not bad. Don't I look handsome?'²⁷

Hercules' response reveals his characteristic vanity, but also forms an insightful comment on the nature of artistic representation through the course of the mythic tradition. The hero does not seem to have any difficulty recognising his own face rendered in symbolic form, nor does he appear at all surprised that his image features on a coin from the distant future. In a clever moment of metafiction, Simon confronts the character with his own myth.

One of the most intriguing objects enabling travel through time is a book, an object richly loaded with metafictional significance. Famously used in Michael Ende's *Neverending Story*,²⁸ books also feature in both Scieszka's *It's All Greek to Me* and Charlie Carter's *Battle Boy: Destroy Troy*. Chapter Eight will propose that the presence of a textual object within the story invariably turns attention on to the nature of the framing text, as well as the role of books in the perpetuation of the mythic tradition more generally.

²⁵ Maria Nikolajeva, *The Magic Code: The Use of Magical Patterns in Fantasy for Children* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1988). p.86ff.

²⁶ Simon. p.24

²⁷ Ibid. p.20-1

²⁸ Nikolajeva, *The Magic Code: The Use of Magical Patterns in Fantasy for Children*. p.38

Chapter Six

In *Helping Hercules*, Susan becomes responsible for many of the famous deeds of myth. She advises Hercules to redirect the course of the Alpheus and Peneus rivers in order to clean out the Augean stables, subdues Cerberus with her (appalling) violin playing when Orpheus is too frightened to do so, and tames Pegasus so that Bellerophon can put a bridle on him. The text stresses that her agency within these well-known moments still fails to be memorialised within the mythic tradition. Finding herself back in her own bedroom after her adventure with Hercules, Susan goes immediately to her book of Greek myths and is disappointed to learn that '[h]e *did* take all the credit for cleaning the stables'.²⁹ This moment is striking for the way it highlights the disjuncture between the established, traditional, published account of mythology, and Susan's personal experience of it. The text seems to be making a comment here on the silences within myth, and potentially, promoting a feminist notion that it is moments of female agency which have been denied a place in the tradition. When he refuses to give back her magic coin, Susan threatens the hero, saying:

'Is this all the thanks I get? Or do you want people to know that the great Hercules needed a girl's help to complete one of his labours?'

Hercules paused.

'All right,' he said. 'I'll give the coin back if you swear an oath you will keep your part in my labour a secret.'³⁰

In this way, the reader is made complicit in the conspiracy that the hyper-masculine Hercules was actually outdone by a little girl. Susan goes on to assume the mantle of archetypal helper of heroes. She confidently announces to Perseus: 'I've helped many heroes. You seem worthy – I'll help you, too.'³¹ She is frustrated by, yet seems oddly resigned to, her lack of recognition within the male dominated mythological tradition.

The book's closing chapter engages with the theme of the proximity of the world of myth to our own, when Susan finds herself trapped in the mythic world, having left her magic coin back in the contemporary era. Simon's text complies with the rules of most time travel stories that characters

²⁹ Simon. p.22

³⁰ Ibid. p.21-2

³¹ Ibid. p.72

must always return to their own time.³² In a reversal of their original roles, it is Hercules who now helps Susan to communicate across the ages and alert her brother and sister to her predicament:

'I will call to them,' said Hercules.
'I will call to them,' said Perseus, joining him.
'I will call to them,' said Andromeda.
'I will call to them,' said Orpheus.³³

These four renowned figures form a circle around Susan, open their mouths wide, and although 'no sound came out',³⁴ send a message to the modern age. Sleepy and disoriented, Susan's siblings arrive bearing the magic coin needed for her to return to her own time. This arresting image of Hercules and his companions calling through time and space functions as a metaphor for the way in which the world of myth continues to infiltrate the modern world. That their voices seem inaudible to Susan suggests that the presence of mythology is often subtle and indirect, but powerful nonetheless.

Relieved to be safely back in her own time, Susan gazes up at the night sky and identifies the constellations above her. 'There was Orion, with his belt of three stars. There was Perseus, Andromeda, and Pegasus. There was Orpheus. And there was Hercules...'³⁵ The stars function as a tangible reminder of the presence of elements of ancient myth within modern life. In a lasting reminder of the ongoing link between the mythic and modern worlds, Susan hears voices 'everywhere, calling to her from the stars'.³⁶ This reference to astronomy's mythical basis provides simple yet compelling evidence for the endurance of mythological detail in our modern world.

Drawing upon the traditional narrative elements of the time travel genre, many of these stories feature *paralepsis*, in which primary time stands still while the characters journey into the secondary world. This device features in *It's All Greek to Me*, Simon's *Helping Hercules*, as well as in Gibbons' *Shadow of the Minotaur*, when Phoenix' mother watches as her son and husband play out the

³² Nikolajeva addresses a narrative trope in which authors 'take their protagonists into unfamiliar worlds and let them undergo trials or perform heroic deeds, but bring them back safely into the familiar world.' Nikolajeva, *From Mythic to Linear: Time in Children's Literature*. p.125

³³ Simon. p.119-20

³⁴ *Ibid.* p.120

³⁵ *Ibid.* p.121

³⁶ *Ibid.*

computer game while time stands frozen around her.³⁷ Paralepsis is a useful narrative device allowing authors to avoid dealing with the logic of the time travelling character being missed in primary time. Such adventures reliably conclude with the character's return to the modern world; no-one can remain in myth.

The works consistently engage with the problems that can arise from interference with the past. While the nature of myths means that there is less concern with the 'grandfather paradox', in which time travellers risk cancelling out their own existence,³⁸ there is a major preoccupation with how myth itself can be changed, and how such changes impact upon the world. Chapter Four of this thesis addressed how the Troy story contains a number of events that simply must take place. Examining a wide range of mythological narratives, Michael Roemer includes the 'labo[u]rs of Hercules, Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece, Parsifal's for the Grail, and the search undertaken by Oedipus' as 'obligations that *must* be assumed.'³⁹ Yet it is plain that other mythic moments remain open to creative reinterpretation by contemporary storytellers. The time travel texts exhibit a high degree of concern with the consequences of interfering with established events. Sam worries that '[i]f the monsters take over Mount Olympus, all the stories of the Greek myths will be changed and I think we will be in a whole lot of permanent trouble.'⁴⁰ It is not made clear whether the 'we' he refers to simply connotes Joe, Fred and himself, or if these variations to the myths have more far reaching consequences for the entire human race.

In their retellings of the Judgement of Paris episode, both Simon and Scieszka give readers a false kind of hope that things might turn out differently before reverting to the traditional outcome. Both texts advocate Athena as the most deserving recipient of the golden apple, with the Goddess of Wisdom potentially symbolising the value of knowing one's myths. Ultimately, however, in both cases the traditional narrative order of the myth asserts itself and Aphrodite gets the apple. There is a sense that whatever one does, ultimately things will end up as they should.

³⁷ Gibbons. p.197

³⁸ Nahin. p.40

³⁹ Roemer. p.5

⁴⁰ Scieszka. p.56

Carter's *Destroy Troy* goes further, drawing upon other time travel narratives in exploring the potential for the saving of lives. When the Trojan Princess Polyxena rescues Napoleon from the traitorous Antenor, he feels compelled to save her from the inevitable destruction of her city. While the text sanctions minor interventions in the narrative, such as when Napoleon subdues Ulysses by zapping him with his laser, ultimately, a traditionalist position is upheld. Napoleon is reminded that '[y]ou cannot change what has already happened'.⁴¹

Paul Nahin likens characters from a future time to omniscient gods, empowered with the knowledge of how things ultimately turn out.⁴² Yet such knowledge cannot always be depended on. Having become familiar with the way in which her magic coin works, when Susan sees that it depicts the winged boy Icarus, she went

to her bookshelf and got down her book of Greek myths. This time she'd be well prepared. She quickly read the sad story of Icarus and his father, the inventor Daedalus, their escape from their prison on Crete, and Icarus' tragic end when the wax holding his wings melted.⁴³

However, when Susan enters the mythic landscape, she finds a young man sitting weeping. 'I don't remember this bit, thought Susan. Never mind, perhaps the story was wrong'.⁴⁴ She confidently greets him as Icarus, only to find that she herself has been tricked, and has ended up in an entirely different myth, for the young man is in fact Perseus. This scene reveals myth's overarching power, a force one cannot try to 'cheat'.⁴⁵ The story can never be wrong.

In placing such emphasis upon this theme, authors seem mindful of the way that they themselves are interfering with the stories of myth. While their characters must uphold the sanctity of the myths, the authors revel in the freedom to play with the tradition. The time travel texts involve some of the most radical responses to the traditional way in which myths have been told and retold.

Scieszka is markedly self-conscious about the implications of his own authorial interference in *It's All Greek to Me*. The text features multiple versions of written narrative, with the canonical versions of

⁴¹ Carter. p.44

⁴² Nahin. p.33

⁴³ Simon. p.70

⁴⁴ Ibid. p.71

⁴⁵ Ibid.

the myths the boys are studying at school challenged by their irreverent school play *The Myth of Power*. When the boys travel into myth, these alternative versions merge together. Joe realises that 'The Book has somehow sent us into our own play and the Greek myths all mixed together,'⁴⁶ replacing the 'all-powerful Zeus you read about' with 'the goofy, thunderbolt-losing Zeus from our play.'⁴⁷ Scieszka seems mindful that his own text forms yet another version of the myths.

This discussion has addressed a collection of texts in which characters from the present (and in the case of *Battle Boy*, from the future) travel into the world of myth. Such journeys, it has been argued, play out to the reader's desire to come into direct contact with myth. The final part of this Chapter will confront the opposing principle that elements of the ancient world have survived into the contemporary age. Both these narrative structures, it is clear, ultimately strive to highlight the enduring relevance of ancient myth within the contemporary context.

Myth Repeats: *The Gods in Winter*

The myth of Demeter and Persephone has been frequently retold for children, usually as an aetiological story about the establishment of the seasonal cycle.⁴⁸ Patricia Miles' *The Gods in Winter* goes far beyond this traditional way of representing the myth to explore the relationship between mythological and linear time, and the intrusion of the sacred, fundamental world of myth into the domestic sphere of the everyday. I will contend that this text locates classical mythology around the edges – and in particular below the surface – of everyday modern life. In suggesting that the ancient myths are destined to play themselves out repeatedly, I will argue that Miles draws upon Gérard Genette's conception of iterative time. This notion of myth as an eternal concept has important implications for the future of these stories and this literary genre. Like so many recent retellings of myth, this text is preoccupied with the craft of storytelling, and in particular, the conversion of lived experience into written text.

⁴⁶ Scieszka. p.13

⁴⁷ Ibid. p.16

⁴⁸ Blackford. p.1

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The Gods in Winter draws extensively on the retelling of the myth featured in *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, particularly the episode in which Demeter disguises herself and takes on the role of nursemaid to the child of the royal family of Eleusis.⁴⁹ For the greater part of the novel, these events remain obscure and mysterious. The primary narrative, set in 1970s England, concerns the Brambles, an ordinary, middle class family with a scientist father, teacher mother, and three children, Adam, Lottie and Zach, with another, the baby Beth, born during the course of the narrative.

In contrast to many of the other texts discussed in this Chapter, the Bramble family act as witnesses to, rather than active participants in, the mythic saga. While driving to their new home, they catch sight of an attractive young girl picking poppies in a field, then soon after see her being driven away at breakneck speed by a man in 'a huge black open car, all glistening and gleaming'.⁵⁰ Soon after that, they find that the weather has turned 'darker and colder'.⁵¹ Settling into their new home, the family take on a housekeeper, Mrs Korngold, to help with the new baby. Although her domestic skills are unreliable and her moods frequently unpredictable, through the course of the long, harsh winter Mrs Korngold becomes an important part of the family unit. Gradually it emerges that she has lost contact with her own daughter, and that she has extraordinary powers; saving Lottie's life after she falls off a pony, and transforming the children's annoying cousin Crispin into a lizard. As the family begins to suspect her true identity, events come to a head with a confrontation between Mrs Korngold and her sinister brother Mr Underwood. Reunited, at least temporarily with her daughter Cora, the story concludes with Mrs Korngold departing the Bramble household having bestowed important gifts on each family member.

The text explores the idea that the gods assume forms that mortals are able to recognise. Mrs Korngold tells them 'we just borrow a shape',⁵² and Adam realises that 'she drags thoughts you've got in the back of your head out to the front.'⁵³ When he meets her for the first time, his mind is full of images of 'people in distress...families fleeing along the roads, pushing their possessions along in

⁴⁹ Helene P. Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Translation, Commentary and Interpretive Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

⁵⁰ Miles. p.12

⁵¹ Ibid. p.13

⁵² Ibid. p.135

⁵³ Ibid. p.87

handcarts, prams, bicycles, anything.⁵⁴ Adam's vision of refugees under attack from the German Stuka in WWII is similar to Lottie's, which features people fighting to cross Checkpoint Charlie on the Berlin Wall, with 'ordinary families trying to get away to the coast.'⁵⁵ Their younger brother Zach sees 'women in like long black fluttery clothes...a great big model of a horse behind them, and a city with towers all burning.'⁵⁶ These various visions of people 'unhappy, in distress, not in their own homes where they really belonged' tap into a collective cultural vision that mirrors Demeter's personal experience.⁵⁷

This text is noteworthy in that the whole family, both the children and their parents, comes to recognise that they have had a close encounter with the world of myth. The first Chapter of this thesis contended that many retellings feature children who display a special affinity with the mythic realm, often in stark contrast to adult characters who remain ignorant.⁵⁸ *The Gods in Winter* breaks with this tradition by including the parents in the experience. In this way the family functions as what Nikolajeva has termed 'a collective protagonist', whose different responses 'supply an object of identification to the readers of both genders and of different ages.'⁵⁹ It does, however, seem significant that it is the father, who, as befits his professional background as scientist, remains the most sceptical about Mrs Korngold. In an assertion of his paternal authority, he tells the others "We'll go into it all in more detail this afternoon when we're on our own, but this is our plan for now: *it never happened*. That's how it's got to be. Just talk about ordinary things..."⁶⁰ Although it is not stated explicitly, it seems clear from this statement that one of Mrs Korngold's gifts to the family is a renewed unity that results from sharing in this experience.

As they prepare to farewell Mrs Korngold, somewhat in awe of what they have come to realise is her true identity, the father says, 'There's no point in drawing back now; we're all in it – up to the neck.'⁶¹

⁵⁴ Ibid. p.21-2

⁵⁵ Ibid. p.87

⁵⁶ Ibid. p.88

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ 'Relying on the Romantic conception of children as border figures who are closer to the "source of life," time travel translates symbolically into an association of childhood with the past.' Catherine Frank, "Tinklers and Time Machines: Time Travel in the Social Fantasy of E. Nesbit and H.G. Wells," in *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults*, ed. Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry (New York and London: Routledge, 2003). p.82

⁵⁹ Nikolajeva, *From Mythic to Linear: Time in Children's Literature*. p.35

⁶⁰ Miles. p.141

⁶¹ Ibid. p.135

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Instead of stories from a remote past, classical myth exists on the borders of everyday life, around its edges and below the surface. This notion is literalised in the story's setting; Derbyshire in the Midlands is a region shaped by the effects of coalmining. The father explains to the children the meaning of the term subsidence: 'Sometimes the old tunnels give way underground; then the road's liable to cave in.'⁶² This subterranean world serves as '*one of those places where you can enter the underworld*'.⁶³ In the novel's climax, the family watch the neighbouring mansion, a once grand but now dilapidated reproduction of the Winter Palace in St Petersburg, collapse into the ground. The text draws attention to the fact that the classical accoutrements of the property – the mansion's 'urns [and] pillars'⁶⁴ and the statuary in the surrounding formal garden are swallowed up, as if closing the book on the saga of Demeter and her daughter, at least in this incarnation.

In addition to highlighting the presence of classical details in the region's art and architecture, the text makes several references to the value of a classical education and laments its decline. Adam says his parents have 'a proper education with Greek and Latin and a lot of English poetry, not like us poor modern kids.'⁶⁵ Yet although the younger Brambles 'mightn't learn Latin and Greek and all that', they too are familiar with the core elements of the myth.⁶⁶ Zach knows about it from 'a story we had at school',⁶⁷ though his earlier comment that Mrs Korngold 'just tells me stories'⁶⁸ seems to suggest that some of his familiarity with the Greek myths comes from the goddess herself.

In this way the text plays with the notion that Demeter's story is ancient and remote, yet at the same time a recurring event with immediate and far reaching effects. It is as if Demeter, Hades, Persephone and the other gods are compelled to perpetually repeat their roles in the saga. They are under the influence of a story that is much greater than they are. The children suspect that Mrs Korngold 'goes and stays with someone every year'.⁶⁹ The myth's focus on seasonal change, alluded to in the book's title, provides another dimension to this endless repetition; the seasons are at once permanently established and eternally re-determined.

⁶² Ibid. p.11

⁶³ Ibid. p.146 (author's emphasis)

⁶⁴ Ibid. p.142

⁶⁵ Ibid. p.3

⁶⁶ Ibid. p.132

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid. p.87

⁶⁹ Ibid. p.141

This aspect of the text conforms to Gérard Genette's notion of the iterative frequency,⁷⁰ a grammatical category that has been largely lost in many modern languages but is still retained in some forms. The iterative centres upon the present tense and is associated with the somewhat awkward sounding phrase to 'have always been doing'.⁷¹ It is invested with a timeless quality, characterising events that happen not merely recurrently, but outside of the framework of a standard, linear chronology. As a consequence, the iterative is a hallmark of mythic time. Significantly for the parameters of this project, Maria Nikolajeva identifies common ground between mythic stories and children's literature, writing that '[w]hat strikes a scholar familiar with both archaic narratives and children's fiction is that the iterative has widely been used in both.'⁷² In suggesting that Demeter and the other gods re-enact Persephone's abduction each year, *The Gods in Winter* promotes not only the survival of ancient mythology in the modern age, but also a more complex understanding of the connection between the worlds of myth and everyday life.

The book's preoccupation with the nature of time is conveyed in a variety of ways. After the birth of the new baby, the mother laments 'I seem to have lost touch with modern life'.⁷³ On first reading, the narrative seems to have a timeless quality to it, but small details, such as the Green Shield trading stamps the mother obsesses over, help to clarify the 1970s setting. Nevertheless, this fixed, realistic chronology is located within a larger temporal framework, so that the text enables Adam to experience a form of time travel. In one of the text's most striking scenes, Adam wakes in the night to witness a spectacular storm. Standing beside Mrs Korngold, who is simultaneously 'her right size' and 'enormous, like the Statue of Liberty', he is treated to a panoramic perspective on both space and time.⁷⁴ Mrs Korngold allows him to behold the surrounding landscape 'like a huge relief map of the British Isles',⁷⁵ followed by a series of visions of the future and past spanning the construction of Stonehenge to a glimpse of the reader's 'futuristic' age.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1980).

⁷¹ Nikolajeva, *From Mythic to Linear: Time in Children's Literature*. p.9

⁷² Ibid. p.9

⁷³ Miles. p.53

⁷⁴ Ibid. p.50

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid. p.51

This thesis has identified that recent retellings of ancient myth consistently display a self-conscious or self-reflexive attitude to the process of storytelling. *The Gods in Winter* conforms to this trend by framing the narrative as a story Adam Bramble has written ‘about what has been happening here over the last few months.’⁷⁷ The reader’s suspension of disbelief in the narrative is repeatedly disrupted by Adam’s direct references to ‘you, dear reader-in-the-future.’⁷⁸ Adam confesses he would have preferred to ‘put the whole thing on tape’⁷⁹ but recognises that words on a page are likely to remain more accessible to a reader in the distant future.

In the final pages of the book, the narrative is again disrupted by Adam’s comment ‘[w]ell, that’s more or less where we came in.’⁸⁰ Adam describes his family’s responses to his version of events (which are on the whole critical, though supportive of his completion of such a major piece of work) and reflects upon the challenges of the writing process. He says that ‘[t]his thing has taken me so long to write I found I’d forgotten quite a lot of what I’d put in at the start, and I’d left out some things I’d meant to put in.’⁸¹ Such comments have revealing implications for Miles’ own storytelling, particularly in terms of her use of obscure details from various ancient versions of the myth of Demeter.⁸² Ultimately, the transcript of the story is buried ‘good and deep’ within the ground,⁸³ a fitting hiding place for a story so concerned with the subterranean landscape.

The book has an interesting publication history, one which in some ways fulfils Adam’s hope that his story will one day be uncovered. Following its initial release in 1978, the book remained little known until the writer of young adult fantasy Tamora Pierce championed its reprinting in the 21st century. She had discovered the book while working in a literary agency and found that its characters, settings and language remained with her long after that first encounter. She describes the narrative as having ‘hold’ and ‘grip’;⁸⁴ adhesive terms that highlight the story’s power to ensnare the reader. Pierce asserts that the text retains its influence on subsequent readings, writing that ‘[t]he story still gives

⁷⁷ Ibid. p.1

⁷⁸ Ibid. p.2

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid. p.143

⁸¹ Ibid. p.145

⁸² Such as the transformation of a naughty boy into a lizard, and the omission of her attempt to immortalise the baby Demophon, as recounted in the *Homeric Hymn*. See Foley.

⁸³ Miles. p.146

⁸⁴ Ibid. p.149

me the shivery feeling of captivation that it gave me the first time I read it.⁸⁵ This reference to the text's potential for repeated rereading contributes another dimension to the way in which a text is shaped by time – Pierce finds she has the same emotional response, and yet the reading experience is invariably changed.

With its meditations on the nature of time's different incarnations, and the way in which they impact upon the shape of stories, Miles' *The Gods in Winter* is an important text within the corpus of retold myths. It takes the story of Demeter's loss of Persephone far beyond its traditional incarnation as an aetiological parable to reimagine the myth within the context of a story of a contemporary family. Rather than being front and centre, in this narrative, myth is situated on the edges and below the surface. Miles subscribes to the notion that the boundary between myth and the modern world is membrane thin. The text's self-conscious awareness of its own story status is framed by the process of committing the events to paper, and the issues such a process raises concerning truth and accuracy. Finally, the paratextual account of the novel's rescue from obscurity by Tamora Pierce forms an interesting side story on the potential ways in which time affects a text.

Conclusion

Time is an ever present feature within narrative, though one that is often taken for granted. Time helps us to make sense of the events which take place within a story and their relationship to each other. It is the fourth dimension. The practice of retelling the same few myths over and over again – as well as the rereading of the same text on multiple occasions – adds another dimension to the connection between time and story, and both these forms of repetition have been revealed as an integral part of the mythic tradition and its development. Rosemary Johnstone evokes the image of the palimpsest in describing the ways in which young adult fiction makes sense of the complexities of past, present and future time and their intersections. She writes:

These time-spaces are in a state of constant contextual and intertextual interaction. They are like a palimpsest: other, older, layers of script are glimpsed beneath the top layer of a document which is continuously being written, erased, and re-written.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Rosemary Johnston, "Time-Space: History as Palimpsest and Mise-En-Abyme in Children's Literature. [How the Past of History Streams into the Present of Story]," *Orana* 34, no. 3 (Nov 1998). p.19

This Chapter has sought to show that the dynamics of past and present are constantly shifting within children's retellings of classical myth. The mythic world is at once remote and distant, a place lost in the clouds of prehistory, yet simultaneously intensely present on the edges of modern life. Texts take pains to highlight the mythic legacy, both tangible and more esoteric. Retellings of myth foreground the relationship between past and present in order to highlight the relevance of these ancient stories within a contemporary context, but they do much more besides.

The questions about the nature of time posed by the museum curator at the beginning of this Chapter are also investigated in many recent retellings of ancient Greek myth. Texts which feature characters from the modern era journeying into myth have become so prolific as to form a subgenre of the corpus. These stories share common features with more traditional forms of fantasy and science fiction time travel, although journeying into myth is a different experience to travelling to a specific historical epoch. What is perhaps most striking about these texts is the interest they display in the sanctity of the mythic past, when the authors themselves are performing radical forms of reinterpretation.

Patricia Miles' *The Gods in Winter* features a different sort of travel through time, exploring the enduring existence of ancient characters within a modern setting. A detailed examination of this text revealed its use of iterative time to suggest that myth endures in a form of perpetual motion. Although almost forty years have passed since its initial publication, Miles' conception of the story of Demeter and Persephone, and particularly her awareness of the connections between myth and metafiction, appear to share common ground with many more recent retellings.

Other stories allude to more symbolic forms of travel through time. In Nadia Wheatley's short story 'Melting Point', the Latin teacher Ms Boot observes that '[t]o write something that lasts for two thousand years – now *that* is science fiction, *that* is defying the laws of time.'⁸⁷ The implications of this important work – including its unique status as an Australian text commenting on the gulf of space and time between contemporary Sydney and ancient Crete - will be addressed in Chapter Eight.

⁸⁷ Wheatley. p.214

Chapter Seven: Packaging and Publishing

This Chapter is the first of the final three of this thesis, each of which is concerned with the concept of *text*. It marks a significant shift in focus from the previous discussion, much of which has centred on the idea of mythic narrative, to explore the way in which retellings of Greek myth are packaged, published, and promoted. In essence, it investigates the process whereby a text becomes a book. It draws on the work of the French literary theorist Gérard Genette, who has undertaken extensive study of the paratext and the way in which paratextual elements influence the reader. The term encompasses the myriad elements of a text that frame the written words, from the title, introduction and dedication, to its material composition – size, shape and the quality of the paper on which it is printed. It is striking how manipulated we are by paratextual elements, and yet how easy it is to underestimate their significance, or even to overlook them entirely. Through the course of researching and writing this Chapter, I have become intensely aware of the power of the paratext, not only within academic contexts (including its presence in Genette’s own publications), but also as I read with my three children.

I will consider the role that paratextual elements play in recent retellings of Greek myth, arguing that they communicate quite different messages to child and adult readers, while consistently working to promote the cultural significance of these stories. The Chapter then gradually expands its scope as it charts the book’s journey from manuscript to published work. I undertake a study of the changing design of reprints of ‘classic’ retellings, and investigate the status accorded by literary prizes and bestseller lists. I also delve into the problematic area of the readership of these books. I have found this extremely difficult to measure and assess, to the extent that I have even wondered whether it is important at all. Remaining mindful of the metafictional principle, I have drawn upon the retellings themselves to study their depiction of internal readers of Greek myth. I have also made use of readers’ comments posted on websites such as the juggernaut bookseller Amazon. This prolific source is not without problems, including issues of anonymity and referencing. Even so, many of the reviewers’ comments offer valuable insights into the significance of retellings of the Greek myths, and at times engage with the critical issues that this thesis seeks to address. It is important to remain aware of the fact that the comments are usually posted by adults, but the way in which some of them reminisce about their own response to these texts as children adds another dimension to their reflections.

This Chapter considers the role of mythic retellings as objects of cultural capital, exploring the role of the book as fetish object as well as container for significant messages about cultural tradition. It undertakes a diachronic study of the cover design of Roger Lancelyn Green's from the 1950s to the present day. The changes and commonalities in the packaging of this enduring text serve to underscore its influence, not only on me personally, but on the mythological corpus as a whole.

Parts of the Paratext

While reading Genette's work on the paratext, one cannot help but become alert to paratextual detail, including within Genette's own publication. In the French original, the book was entitled *Seuils* – translated as *thresholds*, an allusion to his French publisher, Editions du Seuil. Keeping this detail in mind, this Chapter explores how thresholds and other framing devices are used within mythic retellings, particularly when slipping between contemporary and ancient contexts. The notion of the book as a package or container has important implications on account of the way it relates to what has been a recurring theme within this thesis; the notion of stories being preserved within storage containers. Here I will revisit the use of Pandora's Box as a vessel holding the Greek mythic corpus, an idea that was first introduced in Chapter One.

An author's text does not exist in isolation. Any published work is framed by material contributed by editors, printers and publishers. Genette coined the term *paratext* to describe the myriad elements which frame a published work: 'title, subtitle, intertitles; prefaces, postfaces, notices, forewords, etc.; marginal, infrapaginal, terminal notes; epigraphs; illustrations; blurbs, book covers, dust jackets...'¹ Other aspects – such as what he terms the foretext - comprising early drafts of a manuscript – are usually inaccessible to the reader.² Peter Hunt refers to the same material, but refers to it using a slightly different term, the peritext. He describes it as 'the written (and graphic) material that "surrounds" the story: the publisher's "blurb", the typeface, the layout, for example.'³

¹ Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*. p.3

² Ibid. p.3

³ Hunt, *Criticism, Theory and Children's Literature*. p.1

Genette writes that the paratext works to 'assure [the text's] presence in the world, its "reception" and its consumption.'⁴ Maurice Saxby has registered a growing tendency for authors to be upfront about their creative inspiration and process in forewords and author's notes.⁵ He has identified that 'the look of the book – its packaging, the cover, the physical format, the size of the type, the illustrations – implies not only a certain age group, but gives some indication of the book's potential appeal.'⁶ Before a reader gets anywhere near the story itself, they have often formed strong opinions about a book's style, status and consequent value. Registering that the reading experience is both sensory and affective, Peter Hunt has written that 'we *do* judge books by their covers, and...the style of type or the stiffness of the binding or the quality of the paper or the smell of the ink does influence us.'⁷

The elements which Hunt refers to highlight the fact that modern retellings of myth do not conform to a particular publication format; the genre includes both high-quality, hardback editions and paperbacks printed on cheap paper. At one end of this spectrum, texts seek to enhance their status as modern 'classics' through the use of lavish illustrations and quality print materials. They market themselves as status objects that can be treasured, proudly displayed on bookshelves, and, with their durable hard covers, be preserved throughout childhood and beyond.

D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths, by Ingri and Edgar Parin d'Aulaire, is one such precious item. At 192 pages, this hardback has the dimensions of a coffee table book, and is lavishly illustrated with colour and monochrome lithographs. Since its publication in the early 1960s this compendium has had a profound influence on a generation of readers, acting as a primer in much the same way that Roger Lancelyn Green's retellings influenced me. According to one reader, 'I first read this book when I was twelve years old and it affected me so much that ten years later I still have a deep and abiding love of Greek mythology.' Another writes: 'My mom got a copy of this book for the family when I was 6 or 7 and I read it so much that the pages fell out.' A third devotee was so affected by it that she intends to share it with her own children: 'My Mother gave me this book when I was around 8 or 9, I became

⁴ Gérard Genette and Marie Maclean, "Introduction to the Paratext," *New Literary History* 22, no. 2 (Spring 1991). p.261

⁵ Saxby, *Books in the Life of a Child: Bridges to Literature and Learning*. p.16-7

⁶ *Ibid.* p.37

⁷ Hunt, *Criticism, Theory and Children's Literature*. p.77

obsessed. I'm now an adult and I'm going to purchase a copy for my own kids to share with them. I really loved this book.'⁸

At the other end of the spectrum there are texts which are not designed to be treasured, but rather for quick consumption and a rapid discard. Production costs are kept to a minimum through the use of cheap, low-grade paper. Charlie Carter's *Battle Boy 3: Destroy Troy* is one example of such a slim, flimsy paperback.⁹ Its monochrome illustrations resemble crude clipart. The title of the series suggests that this text is aimed at unwilling male readers, who might be deterred or intimidated by more lavish publications. With this point in mind, it is interesting to observe that books and the act of reading feature as prominent motifs within the story. Napoleon, the main character, travels back in time by way of the Battle Books, housed in the Tome Tower. The implications of this use of textual symbolism will be addressed further in the following Chapter.

From their genesis to acquisition, adults control every aspect of the stories children read.¹⁰ Children's literature belongs to children in name alone; 'we cannot escape the fact that they are written by adults' writes Peter Hunt.¹¹ Although he does not address the genre specifically, Genette's comment that 'many notes are only addressed to certain readers'¹² does help to illuminate the dual audiences of children's literature - the child reader and their adult companion. It is important to remember that readers are under no obligation to engage with the paratext. Paratexts which speak directly to an adult target parental expectations and anxieties about the canonical material to which children ought to be exposed, and promote these works as a suitable place for a child to begin engaging with classical mythology.

In other works, paratextual material communicates directly with child readers, creating a kind of secret world from which adults are excluded. We have already witnessed this process at work within

⁸ These words are taken from reviews of the text listed on the Amazon website, Amazon.com, "D'aulaire's Greek Myths Product Reviews," http://www.amazon.com/DAulaires-Greek-Myths-Ingri-dAulaire/product-reviews/0440406943/ref=dpx_acr_txt?showViewpoints=1.

⁹ Carter.

¹⁰ 'Children's texts are always shaped by the desires and preoccupations of the adults who produce them' writes Clare Bradford. Bradford. p.194

¹¹ Hunt, *Criticism, Theory and Children's Literature*. p.51

¹² Genette and Maclean. p.263

some of the stories, including the work of Pirotta, where children are portrayed as being wiser than their adult counterparts, as a consequence of their special affinity with the mythic realm.

The title page of Sara Fanelli's *Mythological Monsters of Ancient Greece* features the invocation:

*Watch out for their huge teeth.
Beware their many heads.
Count their eyes.
Imagine their powers...if you dare!*¹³

This series of imperatives directs the child to approach the text as an active reader.¹⁴ Their comprehension is tested on the final page opening, which features an annotated index as well as a pop quiz. The irreverent questions include 'Who needs nine scarves?' (Answer: the Hydra), and 'Who has bad breath?' (Likely a lot of the monsters, but the Harpies in particular). A full list of answers is not provided, so readers must undertake a close reading of each page to check if they are correct.

While ostensibly referring to the monsters' strength and cunning, the final sentence in Fanelli's opening, 'Imagine their powers...' could also allude to the arresting nature of the Greek myths. In this way, paratextual detail promotes the cultural agendas at work within these texts. Countless texts make grand statements in prefaces or epilogues about the timeless, universal significance of the mythic tradition. The Introduction to Maurice Saxby's *Great Deeds of the Superheroes* begins with the proclamation 'The stories in this book are among the oldest, most exciting and most powerful in the world'.¹⁵

The titles given to retellings are, for the most part, descriptive. They clearly inform potential readers about the content of the work, whether it be *Mythological Monsters of Ancient Greece* or *The Tale of Troy*. In Chapter One I noted the practice of inserting other titular elements that suggest the formative role such a text might play in the experience of a young reader, such as *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths*.

¹³ Sara Fanelli, *Mythological Monsters of Ancient Greece* (London: Candlewick, 2002).

¹⁴ Barbara Weinlich contrasts Fanelli's text with John Harris and Calef Brown's *Greece! Rome! Monsters!* (2002), contesting that 'Fanelli's re-imagination and representation [of Greek myth]...is indeed able to reconstruct or, perhaps better, deconstruct cultural formations based on Greek myth.' Weinlich. p.86-7

¹⁵ Saxby, *The Great Deeds of the Superheroes*. p.6

In isolated cases, the titles given to texts are even more suggestive. Versions of the story of Icarus has been variously entitled 'The boy who flew too close to the sun' (by Saviour Pirotta), *Wings* (by Jane Yolen) and 'Melting Point' (from Nadia Wheatley's *The Night Tolkien Died*).¹⁶ None of these titles refer to Icarus by name, instead drawing on the wider symbolic associations of this myth.

Cultural Capital

Children's literature has long been derided as being unworthy of critical attention. The genre has been accused as being 'simple, ephemeral, popular, and designed for an immature audience.'¹⁷ Even the idea that picture books, by virtue of their supposed simplicity, should be read solely by the very young has been challenged.¹⁸ These retellings have also faced criticism, or, at best, indifference, from traditional classicists on account of their attempt to transmit a high cultural form within a popular format. Peter Hunt has called children's literature 'truly popular culture',¹⁹ noting that everyone feels justified in casting judgment on its value.

The Greek myths have ties to both the realms of popular and high culture. Their refashioning as children's stories makes them the target of criticism from all sides: classicists are troubled by their bowdlerisation and the changes to the tales' traditional elements, while scholars of children's literature question whether the misogyny and violence of these narratives should be being communicated to young readers.²⁰

Though Seth Lerer believes that '[c]hildren's books are now the most profitable area of publishing,'²¹ as a research topic, the publishing of children's literature has received limited critical attention. Though my study is by no means exhaustive, it is clear that some publishing houses take a particular interest in the retelling of the Greek myths. UK-based Orchard Books, an ancillary of Hachette Children's Press, is one of the most prominent. Their commitment to the genre is attested by the use

¹⁶ Pirotta, *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths*; Yolen; Wheatley.

¹⁷ Hunt, *Criticism, Theory and Children's Literature*. p.6. See also Nikolajeva and Scott. p.260

¹⁸ . p.262

¹⁹ Hunt, *Criticism, Theory and Children's Literature*. p.144

²⁰ For a summary of these conflicting attitudes, see Lovatt, "Gutting the *Argonautica*? How to Make Jason and the Argonauts Suitable for Children." p.18

²¹ Lerer. p.8

of their name in many publications, from Saviour Pirotta's *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths*, illustrated by Jan Lewis, to Geraldine McCaughrean and Emma Chichester Clark's *The Orchard Book of Greek Myths* and *The Orchard Book of Greek Gods and Goddesses*.²² The format of these titles implies Orchard Books takes responsibility, even has ownership, over the stories. Their website proclaims that '[f]rom the young, bright and bold to the edgy, glamorous and intense, Orchard Books provides a rich treasure-trove of titles.'²³ This allusion to the 'treasure-trove' evokes the notion of passing down the mythic corpus in a container, which blends the form of the book with the box.

The majority of retellings of Greek myths, whether for very young children or older teenage readers, remain relatively unknown to the general populace. They tend not to figure on bestseller lists or to win literary awards. And yet the more I have delved into their circulation, I have come to realise that a handful of them have achieved status and renown as genuine 'classics' – widely read, repeatedly reissued, and in some cases, celebrated with award nominations and other accolades.

Bernard Evslin's *Heroes, Gods and Monsters of the Greek Myths*, is one such text, credited with selling more than ten million copies worldwide.²⁴ There is an astounding estimate that over 30 million children have come into contact with the work via its widespread use within school curriculum.²⁵ In 2013, *D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths* was listed in the New York Public Library's list of 100 Great Children's Books.²⁶

More recent retellings of Greek myth have also been celebrated. Rosemary Sutcliff and Alan Lee were awarded the Kate Greenaway Children's Book Award in 1993.²⁷ Alan Gibbons' *Shadow of the Minotaur*

²² Pirotta, *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths*; McCaughrean, *The Orchard Book of Greek Myths*; *The Orchard Book of Greek Gods and Goddesses* (London: Orchard Books, 1997).

²³ Hachette Children's Group, "About Us: Orchard Books," <https://www.hachettechildrens.co.uk/Information/About%20Us.page>.

²⁴ Bernard Evslin, *Heroes, Gods and Monsters of the Greek Myths* (New York: Open Road Media, 1966; 2012).

²⁵ This claim is significant but difficult to substantiate. Similarly, numerous websites, including Evslin's Wikipedia page, celebrate that 'an estimated 30 million students have come into contact with *Heroes, Gods and Monsters of the Greek Myths* due to its repeated use in high school and college classrooms over the years', though the source is unknown.

²⁶ New York Public Library, "100 Great Children's Books - 100 Years," <http://www.nypl.org/childrens100>.

²⁷ Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, "The Cilip Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Children's Book Awards - Archive," <http://www.carnegiegreenaway.org.uk/archive-title.php?id=13>.

won the 'Book I Couldn't Put Down' category of the Blue Peter Book Awards in 2000,²⁸ and in 2001 Adèle Geras' *Troy* and Alan Gibbons' *Shadow of the Minotaur* were both shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal.²⁹

By far the most famous of all recent Greek myth stories is Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson series. *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* has sold more than 1.2 million copies and has won a gamut of awards. In recognition of its enduring status, it is included on the publisher Scholastic's 100 Greatest Books for kids.³⁰ Riordan has released a further four books in the series, as well as another, related series of young adult novels, *The Heroes of Olympus*. The film and graphic novel spin-offs have gained the Percy phenomenon further acclaim, with Percy Jackson cast as a rival to Harry Potter. And as the next section will show, Percy Jackson and his author are influential marketing tools for other texts as well.

Six Decades of Cover Art: *Tales of the Greek Heroes*

The package a book comes in can undergo significant changes over time. Since its first release in 1958, at least ten editions of Roger Lancelyn Green's *Tales of the Greek Heroes* have been published.³¹ While Green's written text has remained for the most part unchanged, its paratextual presentation has undergone transformations that are as protean as myth itself. Andrea Mckenzie has written that 'illustrations on the cover of a book must adhere to the artistic conventions of the time, but make the book sufficiently distinctive and attractive in appearance to make the potential buyer pick it up.'³² A diachronic study of the changing cover design of this seminal text highlights the way in which a book's

²⁸ British Council Literature, "Alan Gibbons: Biography," <https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/alan-gibbons>.

²⁹ Guardian News and Media Limited, "Carnegie Medal Shortlist Announced," <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/apr/27/news.carnegiemedal2001>.

³⁰ Serrailier.

³¹ Genette points out that '[n]othing is more confusing than the use of the word "edition".' Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. p.35 n.2

³² Andrea Mckenzie, "Patterns, Power and Paradox: International Book Covers of Anne of Green Gables across a Century," in *Textual Transformations in Children's Literature*, ed. Benjamin Lefebvre (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2013).

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cover appeals to new generations of young readers, and illustrates the way in which an old story, itself a retelling of yet more ancient tales, can be rendered contemporary.

The first edition of *Tales* features is simple, with a pale blue cover and a central title printed on contrasting yellow (*Figure 19*). Above and below are Betty Middleton-Sandford's illustrations borrowed from within the pages of the text itself, featuring Europa riding the bull and Heracles confronting the Nemean lion. Featuring male and female, and animals both (apparently) domesticated and wild, the pictures are charming and tasteful, evoking the romance and drama of myth.

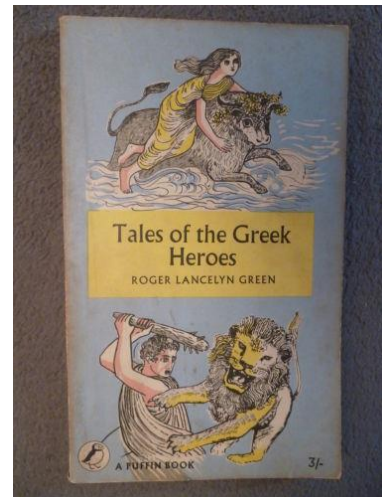


Figure 19: Roger Lancelyn Green's *Tales of the Greek Heroes* (1958 edition)

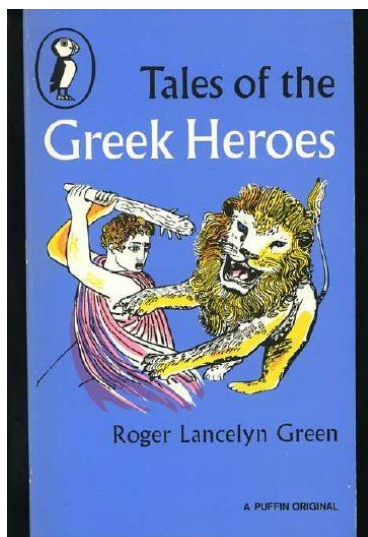


Figure 20: Roger Lancelyn Green's *Tales of the Greek Heroes* (1978 edition)

The next extant cover art for the text comes from an edition published in 1978 (*Figure 20*). It features the same image of Heracles confronting the Nemean Lion. Europa is gone, and in her place the title has been enlarged. In particular, the word 'Greek' has been emphasised, providing greater clarity as to the cultural content of the work. It is worth noting that the publisher's imprint 'A Puffin Book' has been replaced with 'A Puffin Original'. Founded in 1941, the Puffin brand was at the forefront of the boom in children's publishing during the 1960s and 70s. This subtle change in the imprint indicates the development of the Penguin brand, and early recognition of the status of this text as a classic.

A quite different cover appears on the edition published just five years later, in 1983 (*Figure 21*). Blue has been replaced with orange, evoking the style and colour scheme of archaic pottery, and Heracles has been supplanted by Perseus. The picture shows the hero in the

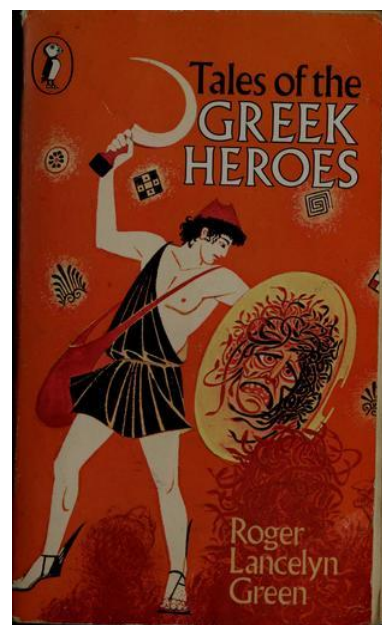


Figure 21: Roger Lancelyn Green's *Tales of the Greek Heroes* (1983 edition)

act of raising the sickle as if to cut off Medusa's head, but the Gorgon cannot be seen. In fact, her head is already attached to the shield which Perseus brandishes. It is a strange moment of simultaneous narrative, managing to illustrate the full round of Perseus' encounter with the monster within a single image.

The cover of the 1989 edition (*Figure 22*), published for the first time under the aegis of Puffin Classics – has a powerful impact on me, for it was this text that I owned as a child, and have kept to this day. I am always moved by the sight of my name inside the front cover, written in my obviously childish, yet carefully inscribed, handwriting.

Like the first edition, this text is sky blue, but its cover illustration identifies it as a text from a different era. Andrew Skilleter has drawn Geryon the three-bodied giant, hairy, almost naked, and brandishing an alarming array of weapons. Some of the arms of this monstrous figure stretch beyond the circular border which frames the picture, as if menacing the reader directly.³³ It is an arresting and disturbing image, one that alludes to the violence of the stories contained within.



Figure 22: Roger Lancelyn Green's *Tales of the Greek Heroes* (1989 edition)

Significantly, Skilleter's image of Geryon contrasts starkly with that by Betty Middleton-Sandford on page 124. In that image, the monster is unarmed, and only one of Geryon's three heads faces forward.

The 1994 edition marks a radical change in the presentation of Green's text. For the first time, Middleton-Sandford's simple sketches are replaced by the far more confronting illustrations of Alan Longford, which, in the style of a graphic novel, reveal the darker elements of myth. The front cover (*Figure 23*) features a grisly depiction of the Gorgon's head resplendent on Athena's shield. Much like

³³ Barbara Weinlich discusses possibilities for the reader 'to look up to or to look down upon a monster, or, most frighteningly, to look it in the eye.' Weinlich. p.92

Geryon's hands on the cover from 1989, the writhing snakes appear three dimensional, as if reaching out of the picture.

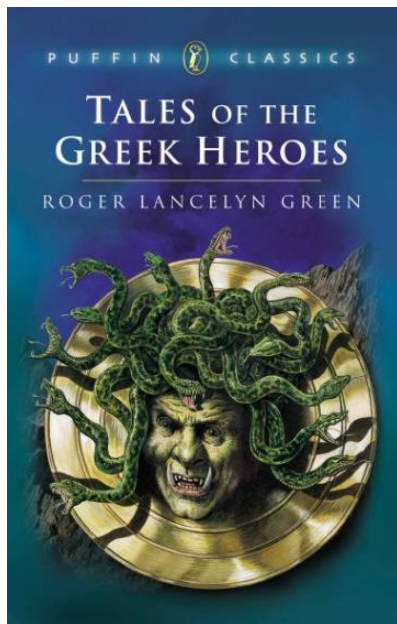


Figure 23: Roger Lancelyn Green's *Tales of the Greek Heroes* (1994 edition)

The other addition in this work is the inclusion of a prologue, preceding the title page. It reads:

In the house of Epimetheus stood a golden box which Prometheus had left there with strict orders that no one was to open it. Epimetheus told his wife this, but she was so curious and inquisitive that life did not seem worth living until she knew what treasure it was that her husband was hiding from her.

So one day when he was out, Pandora crept quietly to the golden casket and lifted the lid. Then with a rush and a cry out came all the ills which beset mankind – diseases, and sorrows, hate, jealousy, lies, theft, cheating, and a hundred others.³⁴

We have already seen the myth of Pandora and her box employed in this way as a launching point into the corpus of Greek myths. As the story of the first woman, it does seem a logical place with which to begin. In this passage, mention of Pandora's name is delayed until the second paragraph, giving the reader a sense of gratification when they realise they are already familiar with this story about Epimetheus' wife. The way in which Pandora lifts the lid of the golden casket anticipates the reader turning the pages of Green's book and entering into the story. The tales contained therein tell of ills and evils, violence and horror, yet the reader, like Pandora, is compelled to read on.

The grisly spectacle of Medusa's disembodied head again appears on the 2013 edition (Figure 24), and Perseus is reinstated. However, the hero is barely recognisable from his earlier appearance on the 1983 edition. While Medusa stares directly at the reader, Perseus turns away. His figure is concealed by hair and shadows, and were



Figure 24: Roger Lancelyn Green's *Tales of the Greek Heroes* (2013 edition)

³⁴ Green, *Tales of the Greek Heroes*.

it not for the immediately identifiable head of the Gorgon, it would be hard to tell that he was Perseus at all.

This text was released alongside new editions of Green's other retellings of traditional tales from the Egyptian, Norse and Arthurian traditions. The covers share formatting and stylistic elements that strengthen their identity as a series. The Pandora story again features as a prologue, and this edition also includes an introduction by Rick Riordan, author of the Percy Jackson books, in which he credits Green as having a profound influence on his own mythography. 'If it weren't for this book, I probably never would have written my own books', he writes. The back cover echoes Riordan's sentiments by declaring these tales to be 'some of the oldest and most famous stories in the world.' The reader is invited to '[w]alk amongst the gods and men', encouraged to not merely read about, but actively engage with the world of myth.

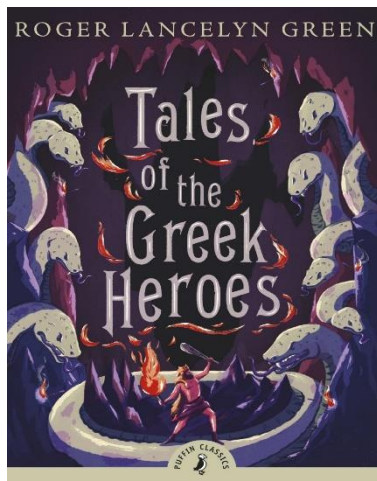


Figure 25: Roger Lancelyn Green's *Tales of the Greek Heroes* (second 2009 edition)

Another edition was released the same year (Figure 25), without the associated rerelease of Green's other works. Its style is quite different, with greater emphasis being placed on the title of the text, which dominates the surrounding image. Perseus has been replaced by Heracles, who confronts the multi-headed monster Hydra inside a gloomy cavern. The hero seems a tiny figure in comparison to the many headed beast, whose serpentine heads do recall the hair of Medusa on previous editions of the work. Yet this cover does seem to break with the representational tradition,

heralding new ways of packaging Green's text.

One of the most incongruous covers was released the following year to tie in with the film version of *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* (Figure 26). The cover features Percy, Grover and Anabeth, standing between an ancient temple and a modern cityscape. The piercing eyes of Zeus fill the background. One wonders whether any readers of this edition have been disappointed to find no mention of Anabeth



Figure 26: Roger Lancelyn Green's *Tales of the Greek Heroes* (2010 edition)

or Grover in Green's retellings. Rick Riordan's foreword is retained from the previous 2009 edition, though now he is celebrated as 'the creator of the bestselling PERCY JACKSON series'. The notion of this classic book, more than fifty years old, being promoted by its association with a contemporary film, is testament to the power of the Percy Jackson phenomenon.

The 2012 edition is packaged as a hardback and features a repeated design of ships, winged horses and waves (Figure 27). The light blue background is possibly a homage to the original cover design. Medusa once again appears as the emblematic mythic figure, but her appearance is far less grisly than in previous renderings. The text forms part of a special series of Puffin Classics, a collection deemed



Figure 27: Roger Lancelyn Green's *Tales of the Greek Heroes* (2012 edition)

seminal for young readers. The aesthetic appeal of these books is strong; to any bibliophile they are highly desirable. With their matching spines in a rainbow of bright hues, they are designed to be arranged side by side along a bookshelf.³⁵

In addition to Green's retelling of the Greek myths, traditional tales are also represented by his retelling of the Robin Hood stories, and a collection of the Grimms' fairy tales. This hardback series – twelve books in all – also includes adult works of literature now generally regarded as children's classics, such as Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Jack London's *Call of the Wild*. The books are frequently packaged as a set – either a 'deluxe collection' of eight from the Puffin website, or via Amazon as a set of ten. For some reason, they do not appear to be available as an entire collection of twelve. It is therefore interesting to observe which volumes are excluded from these groupings, and to note that in both cases, *Tales of the Greek Heroes* is left out. So while *Tales* is considered canonical enough to be included in the series, it has less status than *Black Beauty*, *Wind in the Willows* or *Peter Pan*.

³⁵ Genette writes that the spine is a 'narrow site but one with obvious strategic significance.' Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. p.26



Figure 28: Roger Lancelyn Green's *Tales of the Greek Heroes* (2015 edition)

The most recent edition of Green's work to date was published in 2015 (Figure 28). As in 2012, Puffin has re-released Green's text as part of a collectible series of modern classics for young readers. Yet while in 2012 *Tales of the Greek Heroes* did not always feature within the boxed set, in this context the work of Roger Lancelyn Green overwhelmingly dominates. This set of six books features four of his works (*Tales of Ancient Egypt*, *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, *King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table*, as well as *Tales of the Greek Heroes*) alongside Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* and Johann Wyss' *The Swiss Family Robinson*.

The series has been given the title 'Puffin Pixels', with readers invited to 'embrace [their] inner geek'. The cover art for each of the six titles features a relevant narrative scene rendered in 8-bit pixelated graphics, reminiscent of the style of computer games of the 1980s. *Tales of the Greek Heroes* features a hero armed with sword and shield facing off against a huge giant wielding a formidable club. It is presumably Theseus's encounter with the clubman Periphetes. In the background are several familiar signifiers of the mythological setting, including the columns and pediment of a white marble temple, and the eagle flying overhead evokes the figure of Zeus.

The design of the image is less significant than the style it is rendered in. Penguin's promotional material centres on the appeal of the pixelated cover art:

Whether you're an adult nostalgic for video and computer games of the past, a teen looking for something edgy for your bookshelf, or just someone who tends to divert from the mainstream - Puffin Pixels adds a sophisticated, fresh, flair to the canon to satisfy every reader.³⁶

This statement identifies several different audiences for this new edition. In addition to seeking to engage a new generation of young readers, it aims to appeal to adults familiar with adventure computer games of the 1980s. For me, it vividly recalls the look of Sierra's *King's Quest* games, which were full of allusions to classical myth and folktales. I would have been playing *King's Quest* at about

³⁶ Penguin Random House, "Puffin Pixels Series," <http://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/series/610/puffin-pixels>.

the same time as I was reading Roger Lancelyn Green's stories, so this cover is a powerful evocation of my childhood.

This diachronic survey has revealed how each of the editions is a product of its time, reflecting changing production values and aesthetics. But the most recent release of Green's work plays around with the very concept of time and how it makes a reader feel. This is a text from the 1950s, packaged in the retro style of the 1980s, being marketed at readers in 2016.

While some elements have remained constant over the course of six decades, others have changed dramatically. The light blue cover figures repeatedly, but with very different designs. Perseus and Medusa recur, but are rendered in very different ways, as the contrast between the 1994 and 2009 editions and the hardback release reveals. The transition from Betty Middleton-Sandford's benign, romantic illustrations to the graphic renderings of Alan Longford marks a change in the way in which myth is packaged for young readers, while the two most recent editions seek to appeal to those who love to put their books on display. The inclusion of the text within a series, whether of Green's other retellings or canonical children's tales, has important implications for its status as cultural capital. And the association with the Percy Jackson franchise highlights the way in which mythic retellings inform and reference one another. The enduring currency of this work is clear from the fact that no less than three new editions have been released in the past six years. There can be no doubt that there will be more to come.

Conclusion

Throughout the time I have been working on this thesis, I have been troubled by the persistent question: Who really reads these books? And, just as importantly: Does it matter if anyone does?

From a purely theoretical standpoint, the answer to the second question seems to be a resounding no. Lilia Melani believes that 'it is nearly impossible to assess what all children like to read and how they are affected.'³⁷ In other words, children's reading habits are simply too difficult to document. Maurice Saxby has written that 'it can be argued that whatever the literature says to any particular

³⁷ Melani. p.26

reader is valid for that reader, and that any reaction to a given work will vary according to the circumstances of the reader's life.'³⁸ So while Melani focuses on generalities (*all children*) and Saxby addresses the habits of an individual (*any particular reader*), they end up saying much the same thing.

The first question remains difficult to answer definitively. The sheer proliferation of titles I have encountered in the course of my research, as well as the prominence of retellings of Greek myths within both libraries and bookshops, indicates that these books do have a significant market. At the very least, there is a general understanding that these books serve an important cultural function and should be being read.

A number of critics have remarked on the practice of adults, upon becoming parents, of buying books for their children that they themselves loved when they were young. Some of the comments on the Amazon website are from parents who, having loved the retellings of D'Aulaire or Lancelyn Green when they were young, are now purchasing the books for their own children.³⁹

Nevertheless, Tucker expresses cynicism about the success of hereditary literature, writing that '[a]dults are good at stocking libraries or buying as gifts books they remember as once having liked, but which later have little to say to contemporary children (and, who knows, may also have bored the adult as a child too, before nostalgia started setting in).'⁴⁰ Nostalgia certainly plays a powerful role in the passing down of these books. There is the personal nostalgia for one's own childhood reading, for the moment of first contact with these magical stories. The publishing industry seems to be tapping into a collective form of nostalgia, whether responding to it or generating it. Derek Walder writes that nostalgia 'can, and often does, serve as a key to the multiple pasts that make us who and what we are, for better or worse.'⁴¹ In the previous two Chapters, we witnessed the longing to enter into myth, to experience it viscerally.

³⁸ Saxby, *Books in the Life of a Child: Bridges to Literature and Learning*. p.49

³⁹ Helen Lovatt has questioned how significant it is 'that parents and adults hold the purse strings' when it comes to children accessing literature created for them. Lovatt, "Gutting the *Argonautica*? How to Make Jason and the Argonauts Suitable for Children." p.18

⁴⁰Tucker, "Introduction: Children's Classics and Some Controversies." p.155

⁴¹ Walder. p.3

Chapter Seven

'The notion of framing...is central in the theory of metafiction,' write Nikolajeva and Scott.⁴² The paratext regularly functions as a site in which the metafictional messages at work within a narrative can be articulated overtly. It is standard practice for a text to remark upon myth's universal and enduring power. In the introduction to *The Orchard Book of Greek Gods and Goddesses*, Geraldine McCaughrean declares that the myths are 'too good to forget'.⁴³

⁴² Nikolajeva and Scott. p.221

⁴³ McCaughrean, *The Orchard Book of Greek Gods and Goddesses*. p.7

Chapter Eight: Text and Intertext

Everyone in Europe is familiar with the story of Tom Thumb. However, not everyone has read that story in the same text. There are different versions; in other words, there are different texts in which that same story is related. There are noticeable differences among the various texts. Some texts are considered to be literary while others are not; some can be read aloud to children, others are too difficult.¹

Mieke Bal's description of the traditional story of Tom Thumb and its myriad incarnations applies equally well to contemporary retellings of the Greek myths. In this context too the stories are invested with cultural currency beyond any particular version. A reader is able to recognise the form of the same story even as it transmutes through different contexts. Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer concur with Bal in stating that '[m]any people know these same few fairy tales so well that they don't know *how* they know them or where they first heard them. They just seem to have always known them.'²

Though the corpus of classical myth does have a different kind of cultural currency to that of European fairy tales, a similar kind of 'shared core repertoire' exists for these stories.³ According to Nodelman and Reimer, 'producers of cartoons and commercials assume that even the youngest children will have these stories in their repertoire and will understand allusions to girls in red hoods or giants who say 'Fee fie fo fum'.⁴ Similarly, stories of winged and wooden horses, and phrases such as the 'Golden Touch' and 'Achilles' heel' have the same kind of resonance, even amongst the very young. Their renown derives not from any particular source, but as a consequence of their general dissemination throughout Western culture.

This Chapter will argue that intertextuality is a prominent and significant feature in many recent retellings of Greek myth written for children. Both authors and illustrators exhibit a high degree of self-consciousness about the status and nature of their own text in relation with the innumerable other retellings of the same story. One of the most striking aspects of retellings of myth produced for

¹ Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997). p.5

² Nodelman and Reimer. p.302

³ *Ibid.* p.302

⁴ *Ibid.*

children is the way in which these texts position themselves in relation to the extended tradition of mythic storytelling. In contrast to other literary forms, in which originality and singularity are prized, these texts repeatedly acknowledge that they are but one of many other versions of the same story. Even when they emphasise their status as an introduction to the mythic corpus, they do not tend to assert that they are the only version of a story. In *Fantastic Creatures from Greek Myths*, Pat Posner states clearly that '[t]here is no one correct version of the myths'.⁵

As a consequence, it is possible to conceive of the mythic tradition as a kind of intertextual web, an intricate tangle of threads tying together the multiple versions, translations and adaptations of the same small collection of stories. This metaphor anticipates the focus of the following Chapter, which will investigate the prominence of weaving within myth and addresses the close connection the craft has with the act of storytelling.

A great deal of pleasure, both for authors and their readers, derives from playing around with the structure of the story, taking a new perspective, creating a new character, suggesting, even for a moment, that the tale might conclude in a different fashion to what is anticipated.⁶ Some writers allow themselves significant license to play around with the story, to amend details and develop characterisations, and above all, to expand the scope of the traditional narrative. Margery Hourihan notes that reworked story patterns are 'one of the most obvious examples of inter-textuality',⁷ and over the last few decades there has been a proliferation of 'mixed up myths' in which the traditional characters and narrative patterns are parodied or radically revised. Like their 'fractured fairytale' cousins, such texts seek to derive humour from unsettling reader expectations about how the myth should go. Kate McMullan's *Myth-o-Mania* series (2002-2013) is based on the premise that the accepted versions of the Greek myths are in fact the products of Zeus' propaganda and that Hades is actually the unsung hero of the mythic age.⁸ The blurb of *Have a Hot Time, Hades* reads 'Think you know the real story behind the Greek myths? Think again. Most people only know what Zeus wants

⁵ Posner. n.pag.

⁶ 'Reading becomes more rewarding if the reader is familiar with mythical intertexts.' Nikolajeva, *Children's Literature Comes of Age: Towards a New Aesthetic*. p.156

⁷ Hourihan. p.13

⁸ Kate McMullan, *Have a Hot Time, Hades (Myth-O-Mania 1)* (New York: Hyperion Books, 2002); *Phone Home, Persephone (Myth-O-Mania 2)* (New York: Hyperion Books, 2002); *Say Cheese, Medusa (Myth-O-Mania 3)* (New York: Hyperion Books, 2002). To date there are 13 texts in the series, published between 2002 and 2013.

Chapter Eight

them to. But the truth is, Zeus is a total myth-o-maniac.⁹ Texts such as McMullan's rely on readers being familiar with the traditional versions of the myths in order to fully appreciate the humour and subtleties of the retelling.

This Chapter will focus on notions of the text: as a physical object, as a symbol of a literary tradition, and in terms of its relationship with other texts. First, it addresses the book as an icon which appears in numerous mythic retellings, often in anachronistic or surprising contexts. This practice of emphasising the text within the context of the story is a means of promoting literature and literacy. In the second part of the Chapter, I concentrate on mythic retellings which feature intertextual elements, both literary and visual. I examine the way in which authors, both real and imaginary, are invoked within the course of the narrative. The connections between texts are complex, often subtle, but consistently significant. Some texts even acknowledge future, as yet unrealised retellings. The final section of this Chapter will concentrate on 'Melting Point', a short story by Australian author Nadia Wheatley.¹⁰ This unique text retells the fall of Icarus while also confronting the implications of retelling ancient myth within a contemporary context, and boldly experiments with the physical placement of text on the printed page.

Books in Books

The book is the package, the frame, the conduit, via which ancient mythology has come to be perpetuated in the modern age. Technological advances of the digital age have meant that the book no longer enjoys the privileged position it once did, and must compete with other forms of media, including the rise of the e-book. Even so, in many quarters the book continues to be revered as the source of authority, wisdom and culture. The previous Chapter explored the presentation of myth within the package of the book, enclosed within a paratextual framework of cover and title page, blurb and author's note, in addition to the secondary levels of framing and packaging that contribute to the placement of the book on a shelf in a library or bookshop. It was argued that the couching of myth within these layers provides further evidence of the self-conscious attitude towards storytelling that underpins so many of the retellings themselves.

⁹ *Have a Hot Time, Hades (Myth-O-Mania 1)*.

¹⁰ Wheatley.

Building upon these foundations, I will consider the book as both a literary metaphor and a visual icon. Numerous contemporary retellings of ancient Greek myth exhibit a persistent (and often unexpected) focus on books, literature and the experience of reading myth within the stories themselves. Maria Nikolajeva has recognised the growing prominence of metafictional moments in children's literature, including 'books about the writing of books, books which somehow explain themselves, investigating the existence of writing by describing the creative process itself.'¹¹ While the phenomenon has yet to receive the critical attention it warrants, it is clear to me that such references send a direct message to the reader about the value of literary engagement.

Many works of children's literature seek to promote the value of books via what John Stephens has termed 'fictive situations in which characters are represented as reading.'¹² A narrative's protagonist, particularly a child, is represented as not only gleaning useful information from books, but also learning to love literature itself, even (or at times especially) when at first they didn't. The message of such scenes is simple and consistent: books are useful, special, fun. In Francesca Simon's *Helping Hercules*, Susan consults her mythological dictionary to check if Hercules has kept his promise to her.¹³ She also uses this book in an attempt to outsmart her time travelling coin by reading up on the mythic story into which she believes she will next be transported. Not to be cheated, the coin sends her into another, unfamiliar myth instead.

Phoenix Graves, the hero of Alan Gibbons' *Shadow of the Minotaur*, is an important example of an internal reader, with his nose buried 'in a book of Greek myths half the evening'.¹⁴ The work exhibits a high degree of self-consciousness about its readers and the fact that like Phoenix, they are modern readers of mythic stories. Yet the text, via the attitudes of its hero, acknowledges that in the modern world, the Greek myths are far from cool. 'Geek myths would be more like it' reflects Phoenix.¹⁵

¹¹ Nikolajeva, *Children's Literature Comes of Age: Towards a New Aesthetic*. p.190

¹² Stephens.p.48

¹³ Simon. p.22

¹⁴ Gibbons. p.13

¹⁵ Ibid. p.20

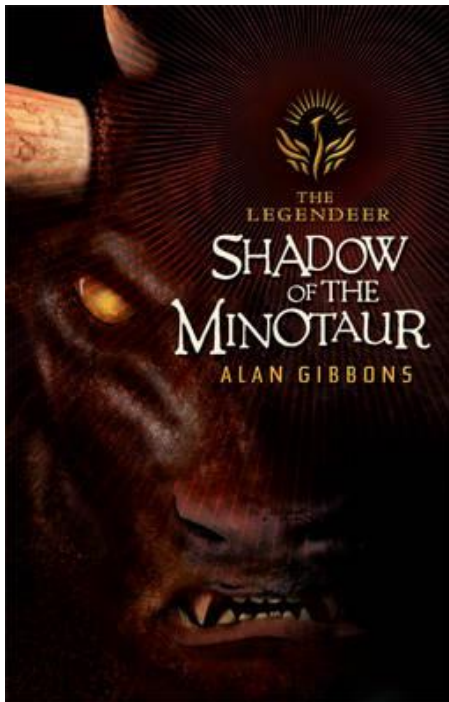


Figure 29: Alan Gibbons' *Shadow of the Minotaur* (2000)

The fact that his much loved mythological dictionary is packaged in a 'drab olive-green cover' seems to allude to the fusty, antiquated reputation of classical mythology.¹⁶ The description of this text contrasts sharply with the cover design of *Shadow of the Minotaur*, which features the terrifying visage of the monstrous bull, replete with yellow eyes and vicious teeth (Figure 29). In this way, myth itself is given a new package. This can be read as an attempt to refashion the status of the classics. Gibbons embraces the idea of the 'geek myths', but seeks to invest it with a new mystique. All things geeky are cool again.

Yet ultimately the text presents an ambivalence about the value of mythic knowledge. While it enables him to navigate and ultimately win the virtual reality computer game in which he ends up trapped, Phoenix's obsession with myth seems too extreme, dangerously disconnecting him from reality. He recognises this himself when he looks 'around the people on the packed bus and reali[s]ed that not one of them would be worrying about myths and monsters. It wasn't the sort of thing people thought about on a Monday morning on their way to school or work.'¹⁷ In his certainty that he is somehow special, marked out as a hero, he reveals himself as a fairly unappealing character. Ultimately, the text fails to provide a clear cut answer to Phoenix's insistence that 'stories can be better than real life.'¹⁸

There are other moments within some retellings in which characters from the myths themselves, as opposed to modern protagonists like Susan and Phoenix, are represented as engaging with books. In Geraldine McCaughrean's *The Orchard Book of Greek Myths* Pandora 'tried to read' in an attempt to distract herself from the alluring locked chest.¹⁹ The text does not reveal Pandora's choice of reading

¹⁶ Ibid. p.21

¹⁷ Ibid. p.55

¹⁸ Ibid. p.13

¹⁹ McCaughrean, *The Orchard Book of Greek Myths*. p.12

material, but her assumption that the box is 'full of cloth – or dishes – or papers. Something dull' seems to link Pandora's foolishness with her disregard of the printed word.²⁰ A similar, tongue-in-cheek attitude to the book is also expressed in Kathryn Hewitt's *Midas and the Golden Touch*, which, as will be argued below, at once honours and undermines the text's intertextual relationship with Nathaniel Hawthorne's treatment of the same story.²¹ When Midas' touches one of the books in his library, '[t]he pages became thin golden plates, making the wisdom of the book disappear, but Midas was too busy putting on his clothes to notice.'²²

Pandora and King Midas are among the most prominent negative paradigms within the mythic corpus, and their attitudes towards literature are employed as evidence of their foolishness. Readers are encouraged to judge them on account of their poor decisions as well as their disregard for the wisdom of books. Significantly, Midas reveals his familiarity with other stories about magic wishes and determines not to fall into the same trap as those who have gone before him, and yet does exactly that ('Ah, the Golden Touch, says Quicksilver. Haven't had that one for ages').²³ In other words, his knowledge of myth fails him, just as in Susan's attempt to swot up on mythology. Pandora too is judged harshly for her attitude to the printed page; she should have been reading rather than delving into the forbidden box.

In addition to these moments of textual engagement are those which emphasise oral performance.²⁴ In fact, it would seem that such scenes are actually more common. Their pre-eminence is especially significant in light of the fact that they appear to be deliberately ignoring their own book-bound status. Geraldine McCaughrean's *The Orchard Book of Greek Gods and Goddesses* employs the tale of Zeus' seduction of Io as an overarching frame narrative within which the other tales within the anthology are told.²⁵ Charged with the task of putting Argus to sleep in order for Zeus to have his rendezvous, Hermes tells the monster the stories that are contained within the collection: 'Here are the stories he told.'²⁶ At the conclusion of most of the stories within the anthology, the story returns to Hermes and

²⁰ Ibid. p.11-2

²¹ Hewitt.

²² Ibid. n.pag.

²³ Ibid. n.pag.

²⁴ In Ian Serrailier's *Heracles the Strong*, Teiresias tells Alcmena that the 'women of Argos, as they card the wool about their knees at evening, will sing your name and honour you always.' Serrailier. p.13

²⁵ McCaughrean, *The Orchard Book of Greek Gods and Goddesses*.

²⁶ Ibid. p.21

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Argus who, enthralled by the tales, remains steadfastly awake, wanting to hear more, until the very end of the book.

One of the most striking, and confounding, uses of the book as a metaphor appears in another work of McCaughrean's: *Myths and Legends of the World: The Silver Treasure*.²⁷ The story entitled 'A Question of Life and Death: A Greek Myth' is one of the only contemporary retellings of the Oedipus legend written for children. The story overlooks the details of Oedipus' patricide and incest to concentrate solely on his encounter with the Sphinx. When Oedipus successfully answers the Sphinx's riddle (the text does not explain the details of the riddle), the creature is obliterated. 'Her wings opened no more than a book rifling its torn pages, for she had chosen to die on the rocks below.'²⁸ The image is evocative, yet the metaphor hard to make sense of. Why compare the Sphinx to a book and what is this volume, with its torn pages?

In Chapter Five I explored the sub-genre of mythic retellings in which characters from the contemporary world travel through time and space to enter into the world of myth. I noted that two of these works, Jon Scieszka's *It's All Greek to Me* and Charlie Carter's *Battle Boy: Destroy Troy 3*, feature the same device which allows the characters access to the mythic realm.²⁹ It is a book. In this way, the medium through which the mythic world is accessed becomes privileged metafictionally.³⁰ In promoting the power of the book within the story, authors send a strong message to readers about the ability of their own work to offer the same sorts of adventures. This endorsement of the value of reading and textual engagement is especially prominent within Carter's work, which is plainly marketed at unwilling readers, particularly boys.

Carter makes time travel possible through technological rather than magic means (as in Scieszka's version). Potentially, this frame of reference is part of the attempt to appeal to male readers. Although the details are kept vague, the portals through which Napoleon accesses other realms are the Battle Books, which are housed in the Tome Tower. These alliterative appellations seem intended

²⁷ *The Silver Treasure: Myths and Legends of the World*.

²⁸ *Ibid.* p.30

²⁹ Scieszka; Carter.

³⁰ In *The Magic Code*, Maria Nikolajeva notes the use of magic books as time traveling devices, but does not comment on their metafictional significance. Nikolajeva, *The Magic Code: The Use of Magical Patterns in Fantasy for Children*.

to promote engagement with literature and the status of literary institutions such as libraries. In Scieszka's text, the time travel talisman is not just any book, but rather *The Book*, distinguished by both capitals and italics. This mysterious tome, a 'dark blue book with odd silver writing and symbols on it',³¹ was given to Joe by his uncle, who, significantly, shares his name. Each story in the Time Warp Trio series features the same basic premise; *The Book* transports Joe and his friends into another world, and the boys must locate their talisman in order to return to their own time once again.

Their search leads them into the story of the Judgment of Paris, in which the goddesses Hera, Athena and Aphrodite petition Joe, playing the part of the Trojan Prince, to determine who is the fairest. In this text the traditional outcome, in which Paris awards the apple to Aphrodite, is altered (at least temporarily), so that instead of the goddess of love, it is Athena, representative of the virtue of wisdom, who is represented as the rightful beneficiary of the prize. Joe is urged by his friends to choose wisdom, which will allow them to attain power, wealth, and romance, though this clever reasoning goes awry when Aphrodite employs her 'love rays' to ensure the decision favours her. As I have highlighted, this moment is a fixed point in which the traditional form of the myth inevitably prevails. Significantly, Simon's *Helping Hercules* features a strikingly similar scene.³² When Susan is invited to award the apple she also prefers Athena, the myth reverts to its established narrative course when the goddesses demand that Prince Paris, rather than a mere child, make the choice. In addition to commenting on the status of the child in myth, this (even short lived) endorsement of the value of wisdom is another more coded means of promoting reading, books, and knowledge of myth within the texts themselves.

The book is a weighty object, both literally and metaphorically, imbued with different structural components and layers of meaning. I have sought to illuminate the connection between a book's physical properties and its status as a symbolic object within the mythic tradition. The notion that books can function as a door to other worlds is an established literary trope.³³ The protagonist's active adventures within the mythic realm are made to mirror the passive experiences of the reader as they

³¹ Scieszka. p.6

³² Simon.

³³ As Nikolajeva notes, one of the most famous examples within young adult literature is Michael Ende, *The Neverending Story* (London: Penguin, 1994). Nikolajeva, *The Magic Code: The Use of Magical Patterns in Fantasy for Children*. p.38

engage with the text. In both *Destroy Troy* and *It's All Greek to Me*, the focus is on action; these special books do not actually have to be read in order to provide access to the mythic realm. Even so, learning is intrinsically linked to the adventures – Sam, Joe and Fred have been studying Greek myth at school, and Napoleon's mission is to learn the secrets of the past.

The Appearance of the Author

Chapter Three charted the evolution of the myth of Midas and the Golden Touch, highlighting that it is now traditional for the King to have a child, most often a daughter. Although such a character is not mentioned in any ancient source for this story, following her appearance in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *A Wonder Book for Boys and Girls*, this little girl has become a fixture in many contemporary retellings. Hawthorne has played a crucial role in reorienting the world of myth around the figure of the child. In addition to the invention of Marygold, the framing of the story of Pandora as a parable about the loss of innocence, and Bellerophon's discovery of the whereabouts of Pegasus from children can be traced back to him. In spite of his profound influence over contemporary retellings, it is rare for Hawthorne to be acknowledged. It is as if contemporary authors consider him in much the same way as the ancient authors on whom they draw so freely. His treatment is, after all, over 170 years old.

But there is one text which does acknowledge Hawthorne's influence: Kathryn Hewitt's *King Midas and the Golden Touch by Nathaniel Hawthorne*.³⁴ But while Hewitt is unique in giving Hawthorne the credit he is due within the text's title, her acknowledgements page hints at a rather more problematic relationship between Hawthorne's retelling and her own.³⁵ Below the main dedication to the author's

³⁴ Hewitt.

³⁵ 'Dedications, mottoes and the like are rare in children's fiction and still more rare in picture books. However, they do exist.' Nikolajeva and Scott. p.252

parents is an illustration of a small tableau consisting of an old-fashioned candlestick, a pile of papers, two books, and a picture in a frame (Figure 30). The subject of the portrait is Hawthorne himself, and strikingly, he is looking down with an expression of horror, his hand held up to his mouth. The focus of his gaze is one of the books, which, if one looks closely, is revealed as Hewitt's own text – her name, the text's title, and an image of King Midas and Marygold are all visible on the cover. One corner of this book rests on top of the other book, an obviously older volume with the title 'A Wonder Book for Girls and Boys' emblazoned on its spine – Hawthorne's first work of Greek myth for children, containing his version of the story of the Golden Touch. The loose papers that rest underneath also belong to Hawthorne; the heading 'The House of Six Gables' can be discerned, though the six has been crossed out and replaced with the more familiar number seven.

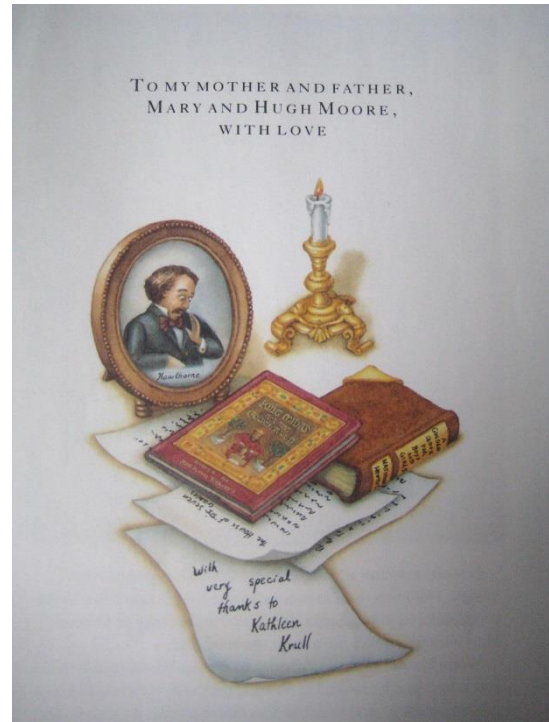


Figure 30: Dedication page of Kathryn Hewitt's *King Midas and the Golden Touch* (1987)

This scene functions as a rich source of commentary on intertextuality and the process of rewriting. In contrast to other authors, Hewitt actively acknowledges the influence of Hawthorne's version over her own, but at the same time, she seems to be implying that Hawthorne himself would be less than thrilled with what she has done with his story. It does not seem possible to interpret his expression as anything other than dismay, although the caricatured style of the illustration does render his reaction comic. It is certainly significant that Hewitt's book rests on top of Hawthorne's, as if to signify its pre-eminence over the older version of the tale. Finally, the draft copy of Hawthorne's adult novel, with the visible emendations to its title, seems to promote the notions of fluidity and flexibility, or at the very least, that it is permissible to make changes to the form of narrative.

Of course, it is possible to read too much into this little image, which is not even part of the main narrative (although, as Jane Doonan has pointed out, 'every mark displayed in a picture book is a

potential carrier of meaning'³⁶). At any rate, it is by no means certain that readers will devote sufficient attention to the dedication page to gain any understanding of its potential significance. Nevertheless, the illustration does set a parodic tone for Hewitt's retelling of Hawthorne's story, which is perpetuated throughout the story, particularly within the visual narrative. As I noted in Chapter Five, among Midas' golden treasures are many objects from other stories, both real and fabled: a golden apple, the goose that lays the golden eggs, the Holy Grail, Tutankhamen's sarcophagus, together with several modern objects, including an alarm clock, a piggy bank and a cash register.

In Hewitt's retelling, Midas is himself well-versed in his myths: when Quicksilver appears, the king stands his ground, 'having read many stories of such beings.'³⁷ Even so, his knowledge becomes a point of ridicule. When offered a wish, he is determined not 'to wish for something foolish, as all the people in those stories seemed to do.'³⁸ In a clever gesture which manages to undermine her own protagonist, Hewitt renders Midas unaware that he himself is playing a part within the kinds of stories he knows so well and is striving to avoid. Even the god's remark that 'No one's asked for [the Golden Touch] in ages' draws the reader's attention to a wider tradition involving such requests, although the irony remains that it is King Midas himself who is best known for craving the ability to turn everything he touches to gold.

Another text to engage with the figure of the author is Paul Shipton's *The Pig Scrolls: by Gryllus the Pig*.³⁹ Together with its sequel, *The Pig Who Saved the World*,⁴⁰ Shipton's story forms one of the most irreverent, and most intensely intertextual, responses to Homer's *Odyssey* and the broader mythic tradition. The title character is Gryllus, a member of Odysseus' crew, transformed into a pig by Circe. He dictates his story to Homer, who appears in the novel not as the exalted father of Western literature, but rather as a 'spotty teenage epic poet.'⁴¹

The humour of the text relies on its readers being familiar with the narrative of the *Odyssey*. Gryllus avoids a lengthy summary of the events that take place on Circe's island by saying, 'unless Zeus has

³⁶ Doonan. p.12

³⁷ Hewitt. n.pag.

³⁸ Ibid. n.pag.

³⁹ Paul Shipton, *The Pig Scrolls: By Gryllus the Pig* (London: Puffin Books, 2004; 2007).

⁴⁰ *The Pig Who Saved the World* (London: Puffin Books, 2006).

⁴¹ Ibid. p.3

seen fit to bounce a thunderbolt off your head, you know the rest-...'42 But Gryllus is depicted as having a bad memory when it comes to myth, and he manipulates other characters into retelling the stories for his benefit (and by extension, that of the reader too).43 Significantly, he is also illiterate, reliant on oral storytelling traditions rather than written forms of evidence like the *Daily Lyre* newspaper.44 The distinction between oral and written textual traditions blurs when Gryllus again addresses his audience: 'Dear listener...you can probably skip the next bit'.45 The metaphors of hearing and reading become blended.

Shipton credits himself as the translator of the text (a term which receives further attention in the third section of this Chapter). He states that he was inspired to write the Pig Scrolls books after rereading the *Odyssey* and finding 'myself more interested in some of the non-heroic characters in the background'.46 In this way, Shipton writes into the gaps of the established mythic tradition. The text focuses on the limits of story and what happens afterward. Stretching far beyond the boundaries of the *Odyssey*, the text roams widely through other parts of the mythic corpus. It even references the story of King Midas. Like so many other contemporary retellings, this Midas has a daughter, Aurelia. But in a radical departure from tradition, it is the young girl, and not the father, who lusts after gold. Midas says to his child 'so you think maybe you've got *enough* gold now?' (149) The irreverence extends to the paratext, in which the traditional publishing and copyright information is blended with reviews of the text from Zeus, the Nine Muses and Homer himself.

The author also appears within Webb and Amery's *Amazing Adventures of Ulysses*, illustrated by Stephen Cartwright.47 This paratextual page, entitled 'About the story of Ulysses', provides supplementary information about the sources for the story of Odysseus' homecoming, the location of Troy, and the personalities of the Greek Gods. The opening paragraph explains that '[t]he story of Ulysses is a very old one. It was written, probably about 3,000 years ago, by Homer, a Greek poet and storyteller. The Greeks loved to listen to stories about gods and heroes'.48 This final statement

⁴² Ibid. p.5

⁴³ On the subject of memory and myth within oral storytelling traditions, see Patrick Hutton, "Recent Scholarship on Memory and History," *The History Teacher* 33, no. 4 (2000). p.533

⁴⁴ Shipton, *The Pig Who Saved the World*. p.203

⁴⁵ Ibid. p.217

⁴⁶ Scholastic.com, "Biography: Paul Shipton," www.scholastic.com/teachers/contributor/paul-shipton.

⁴⁷ Webb and Amery.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p.32

effectively aligns the Ancient Greeks with the present day readers, uniting them by their shared appreciation of the stories. Emphasis is placed upon the recording of Homer's poems as literature (there is no doubt in the minds of these authors that the poems were 'written'; the 'probably' refers only to the date of their recording). And this assertion of the textual history of Homer's poems is especially interesting in light of the accompanying illustration.

The image (*Figure 31*), drawn in Cartwright's cute, cartoonish style, shows two figures, one standing, and one seated. On the left is a young man playing a lyre, and with his eyes closed and mouth open, who appears to be in the act of singing along. To his right is an older, bearded man seated at a desk. He is writing something down on a sheet of papyrus, and other rolls are visible in a box next to him.

It is by no means immediately obvious who these two figures are, but the text associated with this illustration carries the implication that they are in some way depicting Homer and the poetic tradition. But why are there two of them? Which one is supposed to be Homer? The textual reference to the epics being written seems to favour the figure on the right, but if so, who is the other man? Could it be that they are both Homer, but in his different aspects, or at different times, Homer

the singing bard performing for Homer the literate writer of stories? Though ostensibly a small, simple image to conclude the story of Odysseus' adventures, this illustration has significant implications. The critical study of children's literature has regularly been derided on account of its popular status and lack of sophistication, but such images reveal the potential for complex representations of temporal relationships.⁴⁹

This section has sought to illuminate the ties that bind these books: none of the works exist in isolation. The strength of the mythic tradition is such that any and every retelling references others, whether

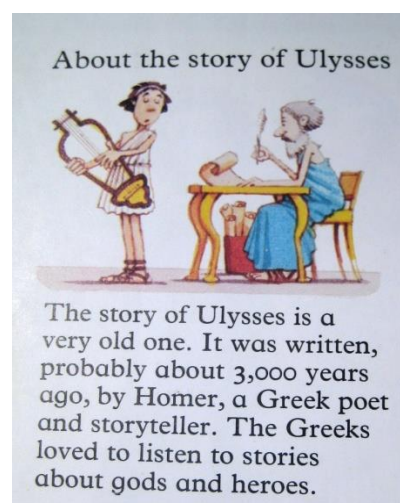


Figure 31: Vivian Webb and Heather Amery's *The Amazing Adventures of Ulysses* (1981) illustrated by Stephen Cartwright, p.32

⁴⁹ Cherie Allan, "Stop All the Clocks: Time in Postmodern Picture Books," *Papers: Explorations into Children's Literature* 16, no. 2 (Dec. 2006). p.81

implicitly or in overt terms. For Gérard Genette, intertextuality is the ‘copresence between two texts or among several texts.’⁵⁰ This notion unseats more simplistic conceptions of one work drawing upon what has come before it, to instead conceive of intertextuality operating more fluidly through time and texts. In this way, Genette’s definition provides a fitting lead in to the work of Nadia Wheatley that will be the focus of the final part of this Chapter.

An Australian Perspective: *Melting Point*

Nadia Wheatley’s short story ‘Melting Point’, from the 1994 collection *The Night Tolkien Died*, is a retelling of the story of Daedalus and Icarus.⁵¹ Wheatley’s text goes beyond the primary act of recounting the Icarus legend to consider the tradition of the myth’s reception in its entirety, perpetually ‘reshaped and reenergised by continued retellings’.⁵² Through its evocation of the metaphor of translation, and its experimentation with the physical placement of text on a page, ‘Melting Point’ explores the multiform ways in which a story can be told. Furthermore, it is a text with significant implications for the way in which reception scholars, particularly those based in Australia, engage with the legacy of the ancient world and their own relationship to the past.

I will argue that Wheatley’s text actively interrogates what the myth might mean, if anything, to us today. The contemporary frame narrative, set in a high school classroom in Sydney, draws attention to the status of classical studies within the educational curriculum. When Xenia asks ‘who gives a shit what the maidens did on the island of Crete in the dim dark days of ancient history? This is Newtown, New South Wales, Australia, in the last decade of the twentieth century’,⁵³ she is acknowledging that the classics are no longer a cornerstone of the academic system. While conceding that the discipline no longer holds the central, privileged position that it once did, the text promotes the idea that the stories from the ancient world retain relevance on both a personal and a cultural level.

⁵⁰Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*. p.1

⁵¹ Wheatley.

⁵² Roger D. Woodard, "Hesiod and Greek Myth," in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Myth*, ed. Roger D. Woodard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). p.397

⁵³ Wheatley. p.208

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When her Latin teacher asks her to summarise the events that prompt Daedalus and Icarus to flee from Crete, seventeen-year-old Xenia Hadzithakis responds:

'Well, Daedalus was this sort of inventor bloke, and he went to Crete, and he built this maze called the labyrinth, so that the king – his name was Minos – could imprison the monster, who was called the Minotaur, that the king's wife had given birth to after screwing with a bull. Jeez, Miss, imagine...'⁵⁴

As Xenia's colloquial summary of the Cretan mythic cycle attests, 'Melting Point' engages with the myth from a distinctly Australian perspective, conscious of the fact that this is a story not just from another time, but also from the other side of the world. But ultimately the temporal and spatial distance between the 'dim dark days of ancient history' and contemporary Sydney is elided, underscoring the continued vitality of myth in modern life.

Xenia is a second-generation, Greek Australian teenager, who is in conflict with her grandmother, a traditional, black-garbed, no 'speaka da Ingliss' Yaya.⁵⁵ Xenia is a bit wild, a trendsetter, who 'has the best ideas for places to hold parties', 'knows where to go to listen to the newest bands', drinks bourbon, smokes dope and defies authority.⁵⁶ Yaya is affronted by her forthrightness, the way she flaunts the school uniform code in her black strappy singlet, tiny miniskirt, fishnet stockings, army boots, and lengths of chunky silver chains around her neck. She wishes her granddaughter could dress and behave more like the retiring young maidens back on Crete.

True to her paradoxical name,⁵⁷ which Wheatley reveals was 'very, very particularly chosen,'⁵⁸ Xenia has an unexpected passion: she is studying Latin.⁵⁹ 'It doesn't exactly go with my image' she admits⁶⁰ but following a horrendous fight with Yaya one morning, in which she yelled at the old woman '*If Crete's so fucking fantastic, why don't you go back where you come from?*',⁶¹ Xenia finds resonance,

⁵⁴ Ibid. p.212

⁵⁵ Ibid. p.216

⁵⁶ Ibid. p.209

⁵⁷ *Xenia* derives from a Greek term with the connotations of both 'friend' and 'stranger'.

⁵⁸ Rhonda Bunbury, *Culture Clash across Generations: An Interview with Nadia Wheatley, Diverse Identities: Interviews* (Geelong: Learning Services, Deakin University, 2004), Transcript of Interview on CD. p.16

⁵⁹ Marion Gibbs alludes to the tradition of 'high-flying' students studying Latin. Marion Gibbs, "The Place of Classics in the Curriculum of the Future," in *The Teaching of Classics*, ed. James Morwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). p.37

⁶⁰ Wheatley. p.209

⁶¹ Ibid. p.231

and ultimately solace, in translating Ovid's version of the story of Icarus, *Metamorphoses* book 8, lines 183 to 235. By reflecting on, and then drawing connections between, the suffering of the exiles Daedalus and Ovid, one on mythical Crete and the other in Tomis, the Black Sea backwater of the Empire, Xenia gains a more sympathetic understanding of her Yaya's longing for her homeland after forty-four years in Australia.

Rhonda Bunbury has read 'Melting Point' in terms of its representation of multicultural identity.⁶² Although she raises questions about Wheatley's authority to write from the position of a cultural and ethnic minority (given that she does not have a Greek background⁶³), she commends the text for its avoidance of cultural stereotypes, and for the way it resists a conclusion in which Xenia modifies her identity in order to conform with Yaya's expectations. After reconciling over a sumptuous feast of Greek food on the school principal's lawn, Xenia and Yaya plan a trip to Greece, with Xenia insisting she will go as she is, on her own terms. In contrast to her doomed mythic counterpart, Xenia's future, according to Bunbury, 'will see her flying high, with confidence and personal power.'⁶⁴

Multiculturalism is undoubtedly a crucial theme of the text, evoked within the story's title. This melting point refers not merely to the moment at which Icarus' wings fall apart, but also to the Australian government's 'melting pot' integration policies, in which migrants 'were expected to give up their own cultures and "assimilate" into Anglo society.'⁶⁵ Using Xenia as a mouthpiece, Wheatley expresses her scepticism for a strategy which essentially involves 'throwing a whole lot of different ingredients into a pot and turning up the heat till everything melts into a big gluggy mess.'⁶⁶

The multiple meanings of the title are one aspect of the story's preoccupation with words and their flexibility. Wheatley has described 'Melting Point' as 'a story about words and language in many

⁶² Rhonda Bunbury, "Old Neighbours, New Visions, at a Melting Point?," in *Old Neighbours, New Visions*, ed. Maureen Nimon (Adelaide: Centre for Children's Literature, University of South Australia, 1997). p.59-70

⁶³ Throughout her writing career Wheatley has sought to promote and celebrate Australia's multicultural identity. Her early works *Five Times Dizzy* (1982) and *Dancing in the Anzac Deli* (1984) both address the experience of Greek emigrants living in the Sydney suburb of Newtown, a setting which she returns to in 'Melting Point'. Wheatley's interest in Greek culture can also be traced back to the mid 1970s, when she spent a period living in Greece with her boyfriend Martin Johnston, and researched the life of Johnston's mother, Charmaine Clift.

⁶⁴ Bunbury, "Old Neighbours, New Visions, at a Melting Point?." p.64

⁶⁵ Wheatley. p.223

⁶⁶ Ibid. p.223

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ways.⁶⁷ The text is multilingual, combining lengthy passages of Ovid's Latin together with phrases of Yaya's modern Greek. Xenia's broad Australian vernacular is contrasted with the more formal phrasing of the Latin translation she produces in class. This linguistic web is anticipated in the story's epigraph, which features a dictionary entry for the term *translation*, with three definitions supplied:

translation: n. (1) The process of turning something (written or spoken) from one language into another; also, the product of this. (2) Transformation, alteration, change. (3) The act of being carried or conveyed to heaven without death.⁶⁸

This passage connects the method of linguistic conversion with the physical transformations implied in Ovid's retelling. The term is cast as both process and product. Most striking is the third definition, for it does not accurately describe the experience of either Icarus (who categorically falls to his death) or Xenia, who does not fall at all. Instead, it appears to allude to the kind of immortality that is conferred on the characters of mythology. Icarus dies, his name and his story endure through continued retellings. In this way, Wheatley references the myth's enduring afterlife in future transformations.

Wheatley is familiar with the subtleties of translation, having herself studied Latin at school. In an interview with Bunbury, she states that she finds 'the act of translation in itself soothing, in the way that I think some people like doing crosswords; that is, as a puzzle you can get out.'⁶⁹ She permits Xenia to inherit this experience; the character enjoys translating 'for its own sake. Doesn't matter what the text is about, I just like...puzzling out the meaning.'⁷⁰ The notion of translation as a puzzle is shown in an accurate representation of the way in which a Latin student might go about dissecting a passage:

*Tum lino medias et ceris alligat imas
atque ita compositas paruo curuamine flectit
ut ueras imitetur aues*

Tum lino medias with thread the middle

⁶⁷ Bunbury, *Culture Clash across Generations: An Interview with Nadia Wheatley*. p.12

⁶⁸ Wheatley. p.207

⁶⁹Bunbury, *Culture Clash across Generations: An Interview with Nadia Wheatley*.

⁷⁰ Wheatley. p.210

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<i>et ceris</i>	and wax
<i>alligat imas</i>	he bound together the base
<i>atque ita compositas</i>	and when they were so composed
<i>paruo curuamine flectit</i>	he bent to a little curve
<i>ut ueras imitetur aues</i>	in order that they would imitate true birds

Then Daedalus joined (the feathers) together at the centre and base with thread and with wax. And when he had arranged them like this, he bent them round into a gentle curve, so that they would look like (the wings of) real birds.⁷¹

Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty has commented on the way in which meaning remains fixed, ‘even when the words of the translations change.’⁷² She charts the way in which traditional stories endure through a culture to resonate beyond its borders. In contrast, Jeffrey M. Green has written that ‘the process of translation necessarily entails a certain revision of the original.’⁷³ He describes the painstaking, exhaustive decision-making that translators are required to perform:

We must weigh every word in the original sentence against near synonyms that might have been used; we must consider the order of the words, the structure of the phrases and clauses, the rhythm and sonority of the language, the level of diction, we must be sensitive to everything.⁷⁴

Although Wheatley glosses over much of the laboriousness of this process, this passage does demonstrate the complexity of the translation act, in which Ovid’s text is broken down into individual phrases, converted into English, and then reconstructed as a syntactically correct paragraph. The layout of these four blocks of text gives them prominence on the page, contrasting with the alignment of the rest of the text along the left hand margin. The careful shaping of this segment foreshadows yet more visually striking passages of concrete poetry, depicting the arc of Icarus’ flight:⁷⁵

⁷¹ Ibid. p.217-8

⁷² O’Flaherty. p.48

⁷³ Jeffrey M. Green, *Thinking through Translation* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia, 2001). p.46

⁷⁴ Ibid. p.50

⁷⁵ Wheatley. p.228

swooping

down

up

down

up

down

up

down up

hovering

In her article 'The Ghost of Icarus', Elizabeth Allen describes 'how certain ideas, myths and images haunt artists across generations and cultures.'⁷⁶ She addresses the impact of Pieter Breughel's renowned painting *The Fall of Icarus* on the work of poets WH Auden and William Carlos Williams, exploring how a myth transmutes through a series of textual and visual incarnations. In this passage, Wheatley allows the text itself to assume the shape of a boy with wings, recalling the work of artists who have revelled in the spectacle of Icarus' flight and fall.⁷⁷

Just as Icarus exults in the freedom of flying, of escaping the limitations of gravity, so Wheatley liberates her story from the conventional method of positioning text on a page. For a moment, the words are significant not only for the meaning they connote, but also for their relation to each other and to the white space around them. The reader is no longer required to read from left to right, top to bottom, but is able to approach the text with greater freedom.

This message, focalised here on individual words on the page, extends to the way in which readers of 'Melting Point' are invited to engage with the extended tradition of retellings of the story of Icarus

⁷⁶ Elizabeth Allen, "The Ghost of Icarus," *Southerly* 68, no. 1 (2008). p.176

⁷⁷ The stark lines of the text contain an echo of Icarus' bold silhouette in black on blue in Henri Matisse's renowned painting *Icarus* (1943).

and his father. Like the concrete poetry, it too can be accessed from a variety of vantage points. Xenia's Latin teacher, Ms Boot, frames the mythic tradition in straightforward chronological terms, marvelling at Ovid's achievement in writing 'something that lasts for two thousand years'.⁷⁸ She invokes the ghosts of Ovid and the 1950s scholar Professor Evelyn J. Douglas (whose commentary Xenia is caught with on her lap) as if they sit beside Xenia as she is 'valiantly labouring away' at her translation.⁷⁹ Behind its codification within Ovid's seminal treatment, lie the myth's hazy origins as one of Yaya's *paramythi*, a fairy tale in the Greek oral tradition.⁸⁰ The text seems conscious of the ironies of a myth so centred on the Greek landscape - Xenia traces Icarus' flight over islands of the Aegean - being preserved in a Latin source, and of a Greek girl encountering the myth not through the traditions of her own culture, but within an Australian classroom.

Douglas' commentary evokes the long tradition of the myth's critical reception. It is a symbol of the formal, hallowed tradition of Oxbridge classics, utterly remote from the sunny classroom in Sydney. After Douglas' crib is confiscated, Xenia is free to construct her own version of the myth, fashioning Icarus in her own image: 'in my version, Icarus is seventeen, like me'.⁸¹ Implicit in this long list of the myth's retellings is Wheatley's own version, as well as future, as yet unrealised treatments. In this way, 'Melting Point' seems sympathetic to Elizabeth Cook's notion that a 'myth 'is' everything that it has been and everything that it may become...'⁸²

Although the short story humorously questions the reasons anyone would want to devote themselves to the study of the classics (even Ms Boot, the Latin teacher, admits 'Beats me as to why'⁸³), the text ends up wholeheartedly endorsing the classics as a worthwhile endeavour. Xenia's year eleven Latin class might be small (it consists of only two students, and the other one is away at choir practice on the day the story is set), but there is no indication that the subject is under threat due to such poor enrolments. In fact, the one-to-one teacher-student ratio is celebrated as a valuable learning opportunity. In what is effectively an advertisement for studying classics, Ms Boot introduces Xenia to the more salacious aspects of ancient history, from 'the political influence of prostitutes in Periclean

⁷⁸ Wheatley. p.214

⁷⁹ Ibid. p.209

⁸⁰ Ibid. p.221

⁸¹ Ibid. p.219

⁸² Cook. p.3

⁸³ Wheatley. p.209

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Athens, the importance of homosexuality in Alexander the Great's army, [to] grisly murders amongst the later Augustan emperors...'.⁸⁴ Furthermore, Xenia is not really the sole student in the class, for in confronting readers so directly with the Latin language, they must translate alongside her.

Through this experience, the text demonstrates that myth has lost none of its emotional power. As Xenia makes her way through the passage, she becomes so absorbed in the story that she herself takes to the sky: 'I can see the islands below me as I swoop in flight...'.⁸⁵ And when Icarus falls to his watery death, she is moved to tears. As she weeps, Xenia experiences her own melting point, her black mascara running down her cheeks. Her affinity with the boy is so powerful that when Ms Boot asks her whether it is the death of Icarus which has upset her, she answers, 'Yes/no/that and/this morning...'.⁸⁶ Her response, which simultaneously confirms and denies the effect the story has had on her, highlights a further melting point as the line blurs between her own troubles and that of her mythic counterpart.

Wheatley has said that she hoped even if they lacked the ability to understand English, readers would be able to grasp the meaning of the passages of concrete poetry.⁸⁷ As he falls, Icarus' final cries to his father fade away to nothing.⁸⁸

Daedalus Daedalus

Dad Dad

Dad

Dad

As with the mutual homesickness shared by Daedalus, Ovid, Yaya and even, in a less serious form, by Xenia herself when she goes on an overnight Brownie camp, in this moment the specifics of myth are distilled to its purest, most universal form. The phonetic slippage from Daedalus to Dad renders the famous craftsman simply a father, any father, suffering the loss of his child.

⁸⁴ Ibid. p.214

⁸⁵ Ibid. p.227

⁸⁶ Ibid. p.231

⁸⁷ Bunbury, *Culture Clash across Generations: An Interview with Nadia Wheatley*. p.12

⁸⁸ Wheatley. p.230

This sense of myth's universality is intensified in the story's closing scene, in which Xenia and her grandmother escape school to catch the Manly ferry out past the Heads of Sydney Harbour. Looking down into the water, Xenia has a kind of epiphany, in which she realises 'that, as all the oceans of the world ultimately join together, some of the water here in Sydney Harbour could once have been in that very sea where Icarus fell.'⁸⁹ Suddenly, the gulf between contemporary Australia and the ancient Mediterranean is bridged, and the relevance of Icarus' story in the contemporary age becomes real and immediate. Back in the classroom Xenia was dismissive of the truth of myth, reminding herself that 'believing in Daedalus would be like believing in the Tooth Fairy'.⁹⁰ However, by the story's conclusion, this distinction between myth and reality is harder to distinguish. Through her reconstruction of his flight and fall, and her close identification with him, Xenia has imbued Icarus with a genuine presence.

Charles Martindale has written that at the heart of reception studies is the interrelationship between past and present:

Antiquity and modernity, present and past, are always implicated in each other, always in dialogue – to understand either one, you need to think in terms of the other.⁹¹

The moment on the Manly ferry seems to exemplify Martindale's vision. 'Melting Point' is striking not only for its unorthodox way of retelling the Icarus myth, but also for what it reveals about the status of classical studies in the modern age. While acknowledging, often with humour, that the discipline no longer has the vitality it has had in the past, it underscores that the stories from antiquity remain critically relevant today. Xenia's encounters with Icarus and with the exiled Ovid allow her to empathise with her Yaya and her longing for home. At the same time, her experience of linguistic translation gives her insight into the way in which cultures, including her own, converge and stories develop.

The text's Australian setting is especially significant, for, as far as I am aware, among the scores of retellings of Greek myths produced for children in recent decades, Wheatley's work is the only one to

⁸⁹ Ibid. p.237

⁹⁰ Ibid. p.213

⁹¹ Martindale. p.5-6

so overtly engage with the questions around why we, on this side of the world, should remain interested in something that happened so long ago and so far away. In this way, 'Melting Point' is an exploration of myth's reception, at once creative and critical.

Conclusion

This Chapter has concentrated on one of the most striking features of contemporary retellings of Greek myth written for children: their preoccupation with texts and textuality. Whether through emphasising books and the practice of reading, or via allusions to the narrative tradition, these works consistently expose the frames and networks of their own storytelling practice. In doing so, they contract the reader as an active player in the mythmaking process, inviting them to reflect upon their own reading practices, knowledge and expectations.

Intertextuality tends to be recognised as a feature of postmodern literature, and it is interesting to consider the way in which today's versions of these very old stories are engaging with this contemporary practice. The current popularity of 'mixed up myths', and the clever storytelling of Jon Scieszka and others like him seem to mark a new phase in this phenomenon. It is clear that it can be intensely pleasurable to have one's expectations of a narrative thoroughly unseated. For anyone familiar with the Greek myths, and ancient literature more generally, it is well known that allusions, metafiction and self-referentiality are age-old intertextual devices. The texts addressed here draw upon these ancient traditions but recontextualise them within contemporary frameworks. More than anything, they revel in the act of turning the focus of a text back upon itself.⁹²

In highlighting their intertextual elements, these works consolidate the mythic tradition. In some contexts they look back in time, referencing Homer and Hawthorne as storytelling ancestors. These figures are not represented as untouchable luminaries to be revered however, but are themselves subject to textual playfulness and parody. Kathryn Hewitt poses an important question when she invites her readers to consider what Nathaniel Hawthorne might make of her version of his story.

⁹² For Alexandra Lewis, metafictional texts are vital in preparing children to engage with more complex literature. Alexandra Lewis, "Telling the Story, Breaking the Boundaries," in *Telling Children's Stories: Narrative Theory and Children's Literature*, ed. Michael Cadden (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2010). p.113-4

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Hewitt is rare in acknowledging Hawthorne's influence so overtly, but her irreverent treatment of him at once honours and challenges his legacy.

At other points these texts look to the future, as when Nadia Wheatley anticipates as yet unrealised retellings of the story of Icarus' fall. Though we cannot yet imagine the shape of such treatments, it seems reasonable to assume that they will continue to be self-referential, creative and clever in the way that they respond to the ever-lengthening mythic tradition. In Terry Deary's *Twisted Tales*, the reader is directly addressed, implicated within the mythic timeline: 'You are the people of that future.'⁹³ We have become part of the story.

⁹³ Terry Deary, *Twisted Tales: Greek Legends* (Toronto: Scholastic, 2004). p.8

Chapter Nine: Weaving Words

When we speak about the telling of stories, it is frequently in vocabulary borrowed from the world of textile production. 'Weaving has long been a metaphor for the creation of something other than cloth, whether a story, a plot, or a world' Kathryn Sullivan Kruger writes.¹ A storyteller is said to spin a yarn. They embroider, or else fabricate, its details. Should they forget where they are up to, they are said to lose the thread. And in order to conclude the story, they must tie up any loose ends, lest the whole plot unravel. The best narratives are celebrated for their seamlessness, yet those that knit, sew, or stitch together different elements and traditions remain invariably popular. These and related figures of speech have entered into the contemporary vernacular. In fact, many such phrases have become so commonplace that it can be easy to overlook their original connotations.² As A.S. Byatt has written, '[t]he processes of cloth-making are knitted and knotted into our brains, though our houses no longer have spindles or looms.'³

The relationship between weaving and storytelling is underscored by the common linguistic heritage of the English terms *text* and *textile* (as well as *texture*), all of which derive from the Latin *texere*, to weave, which is in turn connected to the Greek *techne*, an art, skill or (often underhanded) craft. John Scheid and Jesper Svenbro have also noted the links between *huphos*, a web, and *humnon*, a hymn, citing a passage in which the fifth century lyric poet Bacchylides employs the phrase *humnon huphainein* (to weave a hymn), to describe a moment of poetic creation.⁴ Language associated with the production of fabric has been used to describe the practice of telling stories since antiquity, and contemporary children's literature draws upon this tradition.

Textiles and their production figure prominently in many of the Greek myths. The Greeks imagined the Fates spinning, measuring and cutting off each mortal's life. Theseus finds his way out of the labyrinth by following the thread supplied by Ariadne. Arachne is celebrated as the world's greatest

¹ Kathryn Sullivan Kruger, *Weaving the Word: The Metaphorics of Weaving and Female Textual Production* (Cranbury, NJ: Rosemont Publishing, 2001). p.23

² Katherine Sullivan Kruger recognises this when she notes that 'we no longer consider these terms as being used metaphorically.' *ibid.* p.30

³ AS Byatt, "Twisted Yarns," <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/jun/21/saturdayreviewsfeatres.guardianreview9>.

⁴ John Scheid and Jesper Svenbro, *The Craft of Zeus*, trans. Carol Volk, Revealing Antiquity (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2001). p.21

weaver, but her arrogance leads Athena to punish her by transforming her into a spider, whose webs are appreciated by no-one. Both of Homer's epic poems feature memorable weaving scenes. In book 3 of the *Iliad* Helen weaves a design that mirrors the scene on the battlefield below.⁵ And in the *Odyssey*, Penelope delays the Suitors by weaving and then unweaving the shroud for her father-in-law Laertes.⁶ These myths have been frequently retold for young readers, and many contemporary authors have drawn upon the tradition connecting weaving with storytelling.

In this final Chapter of this thesis, I will investigate weaving as a metaphor for the transmission of myth from antiquity into the contemporary age. Having now comprehensively demonstrated that children's retellings of myth are highly self-aware of their own position within the storytelling tradition, here I will contend that myths about weaving lend themselves to self-conscious reflection on the storytelling process itself. I will argue that in retelling the myths that feature the motif of weaving, authors employ this central theme to reflect on the process of retelling myth, and in particular, upon their own place in such a tradition. These myths provide opportunities for contemporary authors to comment on, and to justify, their own reworking of the myth. When producing a new version of a myth, authors strive to locate their work within the already extant storytelling tradition; mindful of what has come before them. In this Chapter I will show that the numerous myths which feature weaving as a theme furnish authors with an evocative metaphor with which to symbolically (and, at times, literally) frame their own retellings.

This thesis has maintained that retellings of myth are intensely intertextual. The mythic tradition resembles the form of a tapestry, with interwoven threads representing the relationship between different retellings, as well as different myths. The significance of these connections has been drawn out by Roland Barthes, who uses the metaphor of weaving to highlight the way in which intertextuality underpins writing. 'The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture' he writes.⁷ His conception of the text as a woven entity comprised of diverse fragments has relevance to retellings of myth, which, as this thesis has highlighted, persistently reference other versions of the

⁵ Homer. 3.125-7

⁶ *The Odyssey*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (New York: Harper Perennial, 1965; 1999). 2.104-5. On the renown of the story of Penelope's ruse, Barbara Clayton writes that '[w]e should suspect that a story thus privileged by repetition has something important to tell us about storytelling itself.' Barbara Clayton, *A Penelopean Poetics: Reweaving the Feminine in Homer's Odyssey* (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2004). p.23

⁷ Barthes, "The Death of the Author." p.146

same story. The craft of weaving becomes a metaphor for the composition of myth, in which individual elements are combined into an intricate whole, or else constructed differently within each retelling, picked apart and rewoven like Penelope with the shroud. This conception of text as fabric inevitably invites reflection upon its unravelling. Barbara Clayton has written that '[f]or Barthes, all texts participate in a fundamental undoing.'⁸ In this way, weaving and its reverse, unravelling, becomes a strategy for textual deconstruction. The stories contain the tools with which to unravel their own significance.

This Chapter examines tales of the pre-eminent weavers of the Greek mythic corpus. Its focus gradually expands in scope, beginning with the single thread with which Ariadne furnishes Theseus before moving on to the complex tapestries woven by Arachne, and the women of Homer's epics, Helen and Penelope. It argues that each of these myths employs the motif differently, yet these retellings consistently connect the weaving of threads with the weaving of stories. In a number of recent treatments of the story of Theseus and Ariadne, the skein is made to double for the thread of the narrative, framing the text and implying connections to other stories. The second part of this Chapter engages with a number of different retellings of the Arachne myth, revealing that it has been reshaped as a story about creative expression. In the third part, Adèle Geras' young adult novels *Troy* and *Ithaka* are read for the way in which they build upon the Homeric tradition, linking weaving with storytelling. In bringing this thesis to a close, this Chapter seeks to draw together the multiple threads of argument and theory that have been played out through the course of the nine Chapters. The self-consciousness of the retellings has come to inform my own writing, and it seems especially fitting to tie up this dissertation in this fashion.

⁸ Clayton. p.84

Ariadne: Tracing the Thread

Many cultures tell stories about someone finding their way home again by following something that has been left behind, Hansel and Gretel being probably the most famous variant. In the Greek mythic corpus, the story of Theseus in the labyrinth conforms to the pattern. The Cretan princess Ariadne furnishes the hero with a ball of wool, instructing him to fasten one end of the thread to the door of the maze, and unravel it as he goes. Having vanquished the Minotaur, Theseus retrieves the thread and uses it to retrace his route back to the entrance.

In this section I want to argue that several retellings cast Ariadne's thread as a symbol of the ties which connect the many versions of this story. Through their emphasis on the thread motif, these texts seek to validate their position within the long tradition of retelling the Theseus story. Like Theseus, readers can trace the thread back to the origins of the myth and recognise its enduring power.

A ball of wool is a mundane, unremarkable object. In Geraldine McCaughrean's version it is 'something harsh and small and round.'⁹ There is something inherently satisfying about an impossible victory being achieved with the help of such an ordinary object. In Saviour Pirotta's *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths*, Theseus is relieved when Ariadne supplies him with a weapon, but wonders 'what use was a ball of wool?'¹⁰

An answer to Theseus' question can be found in the way that some retellings employ the skein as a symbol for the mythic tradition and its endurance. The humble ball of wool is invested with symbolic power as a guide, a beacon. In Alan Gibbons' *Shadow of the Minotaur* it is described as a 'lifeline.'¹¹ In this way, the thread becomes a symbol of the mythic tradition and its endurance. In Terry Deary's *Twisted Tales* it is 'unbreakable'.¹² These texts promote the notion that like Ariadne's clue, the myths themselves are precious, something to hold on to tightly. In Geraldine McCaughrean's version of the story, Theseus lets go of the thread while fighting the Minotaur. Having defeated the monster, he finds himself bereft, crawling 'about the floor of the cell, his breath sobbing in his throat, groping,

⁹ McCaughrean, *The Orchard Book of Greek Myths*. p.59

¹⁰ Pirotta, *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths*. p.38

¹¹ Gibbons. p.5

¹² Deary. p.80

groping for the ball of twine.¹³ This dramatic scene illustrates the power of the connection, and through her retelling of the story McCaughrean promotes the importance of keeping in close contact with the world of myth.

This message is also promoted within Saviour Pirotta's *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths*. This text features interplay between written and visual elements, with the thread functioning as a frame within which the retelling of the myth takes place. As she presents the sword and thread to Theseus, the skein unravels from Ariadne's hand and runs along the bottom of the page

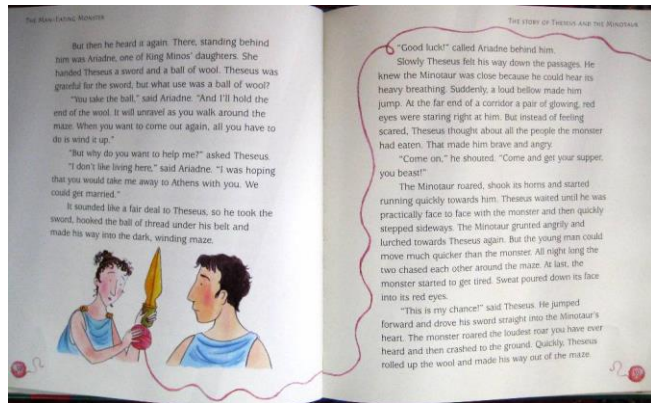


Figure 32: Saviour Pirotta's *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths* (2003), illustrated by Jan Lewis, p.38-9

(Figure 32). Traversing the gutter, it meanders on to the next page, forming a border around the left and top sides of the block of text, before passing off the right side of the page. The thread reappears on the following page, a double page spread without any text (Figure 33), depicting the climactic moment in which Theseus faces the Minotaur in the heart of the labyrinth. In the far left passage of the maze the bright pink thread can once again be seen, trailing along the floor. The point at which the thread reappears corresponds closely to its point of departure on the previous page. Theseus holds his sword in one hand and the ball of wool in the other. With Ariadne holding one end of the thread back on page 38, and Theseus shown here in possession of the other end, Lewis' visual text highlights the strength of the cord, and by implication, the success of this simple, famous plan. Strong enough to negotiate the borders between the pages of this text, the thread stands as a symbol of the enduring power of the mythic tradition.



Figure 33: The thread reappears on the following page, p.40-1

¹³ McCaughrean, *The Orchard Book of Greek Myths*. p.63

Holding fast to the other end of the skein, Ariadne remains in the story even when she is no longer on the page. Jen Cook's young adult novel, *Ariadne: The Maiden and the Minotaur* similarly strives to shift the focus of the myth away from the egotist Theseus and on to the story of a young woman. Cook gives her a candid, contemporary voice: she is a sixteen-year-old who 'hated her life and knew that no one understood her.'¹⁴ Despite these feelings, Ariadne is an empowered figure. As she declares, I 'spin my own story'.¹⁵ On several occasions she employs weaving terminology to refer to the narrative process, as well as the corruption of her ancestral line. She says of her family that 'the thread of my past is just a part of the weft and warp of their cloth, knotted with revenge, lust and greed.'¹⁶ Cook reworks the established narrative of Minotaur by creating her own version of the tale in which the infamous monster is nothing more than a deformed child, the illegitimate offspring of Queen Pasiphae and her lover, and Ariadne's half-brother. In invoking the multidimensional form of the woven tapestry, this text goes beyond a linear conception of the mythic tradition, to explore the idea that the same story can be told in different ways.

Arachne: Story Web

Celebrated as 'classical literature's most famous weaver',¹⁷ the myth of Arachne has been regularly retold for children. The transformation of a woman into a spider no doubt fires the imagination of young readers, and provides illustrators with an interesting challenge in depicting the moment of metamorphosis. The ongoing popularity of this story also seems to derive from its potential to be framed as a simple moral tale about arrogance. Like the stories of Pandora, Midas and self-contained myths, children's literature has refashioned Arachne's story as an instructive lesson, in this case warning about arrogance and promoting obedience. In Pirotta's version, Arachne is 'such a show-off' who 'need[s] to be taught a lesson.'¹⁸ The story's conclusion reiterates the moral message, using a standard lament which recurs throughout Pirotta's didactic story collection. 'Poor Arachne. How she

¹⁴ Jennifer Cook, *Ariadne: The Maiden and the Minotaur* (South Melbourne: Lothian Books, 2004). p.7

¹⁵ Ibid. p.12

¹⁶ Ibid. p.17

¹⁷ Quoted from the jacket sleeve of Hovey.

¹⁸ Pirotta, *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths*. p.28; 31

wishes she hadn't been so rude to the great goddess Athena!¹⁹ It is clear that readers are meant to interpret the story's moral, 'Don't be rude to the gods', in terms of the figures of authority in their own lives, and in particular their parents.

Retellings of this myth are notable for the range of ways in which they choose to depict the tapestries created by Arachne and Athena. In Ovid's version from *Metamorphoses* (6.1-145), Athena's tapestry portrays her victory over Neptune in their struggle for patronage of Athens, surrounded by scenes in which mortals challenge the gods, and in response, Arachne's work features stories in which the gods abuse their power.²⁰ Most contemporary authors tend to follow Ovid in depicting Arachne's work as transgressive in some way. In D'Aulaire's version she creates 'an irreverent scene making fun of Zeus and his wives', with the accompanying illustration depicting the tapestry as a work in progress.²¹ Departing from Ovid's influence, Pirotta describes Athena's tapestry as 'truly beautiful, with silver clouds, shooting stars and moonlit hills'.²² Significantly, he does not go on to describe the other tapestry, though it is 'obvious right away that Arachne's work really was better than Athena's'.²³ In leaving the reader to imagine Arachne's superior design, this text engages them in the creative process, liberating the myth from the constraints of the established tradition.

A tapestry can tell a story, but a spider web is an ephemeral construction. Pirotta emphasises the difference between these types of weaving by describing the futile attempts of Arachne the spider to have her handiwork appreciated, only to find it perpetually swept away by the servants.²⁴ Yet Kate Hovey's *Arachne Speaks* finds power in the metaphor of the spider web, highlighting the strength of the threads as a symbol of the network of different versions of the myth, their dissemination and endurance. The text opens with a proem in which Arachne calls upon her descendants, the spiders, and urges them to retell her story:

Begin our tapestry again;
Cast to the four winds
my story's thread –

¹⁹ Ibid. p.34

²⁰ Ovid.6.1-145

²¹ D'Aulaire Ingri and Edgar Parin D'Aulaire, *D'aulaire's Book of Greek Myths* (New York: Doubleday, 1962). p.36-7

²² Pirotta, *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths*. p.30-1

²³ Ibid. p.31

²⁴ Ibid. p.34

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let truth spread
like gossamer from your abdomens
across the fields of time!²⁵

From the outset, this text acknowledges Arachne's story has been told before, so that Hovey's version is contextualised within the extended mythic tradition. The spiders are instructed to spread the story not only throughout the world, but also through time. In this way, the spider web becomes a symbol both for the story itself ('Children, weave it well; | your silk will tell | a tale of punishment and crime...') but also for the narrative's diffusion.

Though Arachne seems to envy Athena the privilege of being immortal ('She had all eternity | to comb and spin | to weave her stories in!' Arachne complains),²⁶ ultimately it is Arachne's fame which endures. Athena may be immortal, but with no one to tell her story, she is ultimately without reputation. 'No incense burns | in the Parthenon's urns!' the spiders gloat.²⁷ Hovey's text explores the notion that the gods need mortals as much as (if not more than) mortals need gods. In contrast to Athena, Arachne's fame is ensured by her legion of spider offspring. The text concludes with a message of both generational and poetic endurance:

...while my descendants thrive,
weaving our story again and again,
to the planet's end –
even then, we will survive.²⁸

Even though it is actually the spiders who, at Arachne's prompting, tell the story, the title, *Arachne Speaks*, suggests an intention to provide the characters of myth with a position from which to speak. This preoccupation is also reflected in another of Hovey's works, *Voices of the Trojan War*, in which the myth is recounted as a series of monologues written in rhyming couplets.²⁹

Elizabeth Spires' collection *I am Arachne* is similarly preoccupied with the issues of the mythic character's voice and subjectivity. Like Hovey's work, this text departs from the third-person

²⁵ Hovey. n.pag.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ *Voices of the Trojan War* (New York: Margaret K McElderry, 2004).

perspective traditionally used within mythic retellings to give the character a chance to tell her own story.³⁰ As the first of the fifteen stories included in the anthology, Arachne assumes the role of chief storyteller. The prologue begins with her urgent introduction: '*Spinning, I can't stop spinning, so stay a minute and I, Arachne, will spin a story for you...*'³¹ The repetition of the first-person pronoun functions as an assertion of Arachne's ego, and her choice of phrase, 'spin a story', underscores the connection between the two crafts. In this version Arachne's crime is her own self-representation. Full of pride, she dares to weave herself into her tapestry: 'I put myself in the picture as a beautiful young maiden wearing a golden crown, as if I were a goddess too.'³² In contrast to most other retellings, Spires does not reveal who wins the contest, but Athena's reaction implies that Arachne's work is superior.

Spires recuperates Arachne as a figure who ends up being able to control her own story. Breaking into the rhyming couplets of a true storyteller, Arachne concludes her own tale:

So now I spin my tale for *you*. See what I have spun? A web of words, a beautiful web. Do you like what I've done? My lines glisten and shimmer like diamonds in the sun.³³

The ephemeral spider web is substituted for the permanence of words upon paper, ensuring the endurance of the tradition. Most strikingly, this moment of direct address draws the reader into the storytelling process.

With a range of different intentions, these retellings of the myth of Arachne experiment with the binding force of the mythic tradition and the potential for departing from it. Through leaving the reader to imagine what is depicted on her tapestry, or by giving her the opportunity to tell her own story, contemporary authors take the myth into uncharted territory. As a story about the creative process, it seems especially fitting that the narrative is subject to these sorts of experiments. This notion resonates with Julie Sanders' belief that mythic retellings are 'a means for contemporary authors to carry our investigations into the artistic process.'³⁴

³⁰ Stephens and McCallum. p.11

³¹ Elizabeth Spires, *I Am Arachne: Fifteen Greek and Roman Myths* (Atlanta: Square Fish, 2009). p.3

³² Ibid. p.4

³³ Ibid. p.5

³⁴ Sanders. p.65

Weaving Epic: *Troy* and *Ithaka*

The final part of this Chapter will focus on two young adult novels by Adèle Geras, *Troy* and *Ithaka*. Through a sustained close reading, I will argue that these texts employ weaving as a metaphor for storytelling and invest woven objects with metafictional significance. In *Troy*, the tapestries on Helen's walls contextualise Geras' story within the wider saga of the Trojan War, and by implication, forge connections between different mythic narratives. In *Ithaka*, Penelope's trick of weaving and unweaving the shroud of Laertes functions as a metaphor for the ongoing reworking of the mythic tradition. Penelope's handmaiden, Klymene, is herself woven into the story and takes over the task of unpicking the shroud so that Penelope can concentrate on the task of weaving Odysseus home. Geras' work confirms that contemporary reworkings of ancient myth engage with the storytelling in ways that are both complex and creative, and the ways in which they draw upon the epic tradition forms a fitting end to this thesis.

Like Homer's epic poems, *Troy* and *Ithaka* do not make direct reference to each other.³⁵ Nevertheless, they are published as matching volumes, with consistent font styles, layout and colour scheme on the front and back covers. As Chapter Seven contended, the way in which a text is packaged has a significant influence on its reception by readers, and the decision to present Geras' two stories as complementary texts implies that they can be read in conjunction. Their physical correspondences are reflected in Geras' consistency in utilising weaving as a means of commenting on the art of storytelling, and in particular on the way in which she herself is retelling the story of the Trojan War.

Both are polyphonic texts, with multiple narrators sharing the responsibility for telling the story. These varied perspectives underscore the fact that the Troy saga contains many different stories, woven together to form Geras' retelling. While Helen, Penelope and Telemachus all feature as narrators, the majority of focalising characters have been invented by Geras, with their names borrowed from elsewhere in the corpus of myth. These characters are woven into the fabric of the established story. *Troy* is centred upon the sisters Xanthe and Marpessa, orphaned foundlings from Mount Isa. Marpessa is Helen's handmaiden, while Xanthe has been raised in the house of Hector and

³⁵ Powell refers to '[t]he striking systematic silence in the *Odyssey* about events told in the *Iliad*.' Barry B Powell, *Homer* (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004). p.xv

Andromache, and is nursemaid to the toddler Astyanax. In *Ithaka*, the twins Klymene and Ikarios are the grandchildren of the old nurse Eurycleia. Orphaned as young children, they have grown up in the palace, nurtured by Penelope and with a close relationship with Telemachus. Their intimate connections with these famous figures enables readers to get close to them vicariously. The gods move freely among mortals, influencing events and providing commentary on them, although the mortals to whom they speak rarely remember these encounters afterward. Both Marpessa and Klymene are endowed with special abilities to see the gods which, like their intimate relationships with the famous characters, allows readers to gain a privileged perspective on the story.

In what seems a fairly blatant attempt to appeal to teenage readers, the titillation of romance is injected into the tale of Troy, with Xanthe and Marpessa competing for the attention of the handsome yet arrogant Alastor. In *Ithaka*, Klymene has loved Telemachus since they were children, but it is Melantho that he falls for.³⁶ In a yet more radical rewriting of Homer's account, Penelope has an affair with the nicest of the suitors, Leodes, prior to Odysseus' return. Even in this final case, Geras does not directly challenge Homer's version of events, but works with the ambiguities to create her own version.

The texts experiment with alternative forms of storytelling. In *Ithaka*, Odysseus' ancient dog Argos has a small but significant role in focalising the narrative as he awaits his master's return. At the end of every chapter, his perspective is represented in a brief passage entitled 'Argos waits'. His meditations '*sun and moon day and night sleep and waking more and more waiting more days more nights*' help to convey the passing of the time and his interminable wait for Odysseus and the narrative's conclusion.³⁷ In *Troy*, a more extended stream of consciousness is used to signify Xanthe's trauma after witnessing the murder of the baby Astyanax. Her words 'the poor little thing cold and broken and his arms and legs flapping a small doll he looked not much bigger than a doll' (346) provide an evocative and confronting vision of the horror the war exacts on individuals, women and children in particular.³⁸

³⁶ Geoffrey Miles describes the plot as a 'somewhat soap-operatic tangle of personal relationships.' Miles. p.216

³⁷ Adele Geras, *Ithaka* (New York: Random House Children's Books, 2006). p.218

³⁸ Miles argues that *Ithaka* casts war and heroic exploits as 'less serious and profound than the female concerns' that dominate the text. Miles. p.218

As well as addressing the harsh reality of war, Geras' works are also a treatise on the power of stories. 'A story passed the time. A story took your thoughts far away from your own troubles. A story could make you laugh or cry. It could fill you with wonder.'³⁹ Oral storytelling is shown to be a prominent and important part of ancient culture. The texts feature the composition of new songs and their dissemination. In *Ithaka*, the common people come together to celebrate the gathering the harvest and to sing of Odysseus' return. 'No one knew who first sang it, but...everyone on Ithaka knew it by heart'.⁴⁰ Stories about the Trojan War are already in circulation, and Telemachus takes comfort from the fact that there are no stories about Odysseus' death.⁴¹

In *Troy* the Singer, Polyxena's grandfather, composes a lament for Hector that begins '*I have no lyre and no drum. | I have nothing but an old man's voice*'.⁴² These references are loaded with metafictional significance. When Xanthe says to the Singer, 'You can't start a story and not continue',⁴³ Geras seems to be justifying her own attempt at rewriting the Troy saga. At the end of the novel, it is clear that Polyxena will inherit her grandfather's title and carry on the tradition. She promises the Singer '*I'll tell the stories now. I'll tell them what happened. I promise you, nothing will be forgotten*'.⁴⁴

As we saw in Chapter Four, the text regularly makes reference to the craft of storytelling. In *Troy*, Hermes defends the importance of narrative order. "Everything has to be done in the right order, or the whole narrative falls to pieces. One thing has to follow another. You can't skip over anything, or move things along faster. One step at a time."⁴⁵ His words allude to the rules which govern the process of rewriting a traditional narrative, although Geras herself does both skip over plot points and speed things up. In her acknowledgements at the beginning of *Ithaka*, she attempts to prepare readers for the radical changes she has at times made to the established narrative of the Trojan War saga. She writes that '[t]his book is not a version of Homer nor a retelling of the *Odyssey*, but a novel written under the influence of stories that I first read as a young child and that I've loved ever since.' Her comment reveals the lasting impact that encounters with myth at a young age can have, with the

³⁹ Geras, *Troy*. p.29

⁴⁰ *Ithaka*. p.57

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p.29

⁴² *Troy*. p.132

⁴³ *Ibid.* p.162

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p.353

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p.209

implicit notion that Geras' own readers will be captivated as she was. Within the novel, Penelope asks Athena 'Why are you speaking of stories, as though what I'm going through is some sort of...amusement for children?'⁴⁶ In this moment Geras seems to be challenging those who consider children's literature as superficial, and asserting that her retellings have a legitimate and significant place in the mythic tradition.⁴⁷

The motif of weaving, and its connections to the craft of storytelling, is evoked in multiple ways throughout the two texts. Geras draws upon the Homeric tradition in representing both Helen and Penelope as individuals who weave stories as well as textiles. In different ways, both texts explore the relationship between words and pictures. In *Troy*, the walls of Helen's chambers are hung with her tapestries, created in an attempt to alleviate her boredom during the long years of the siege. 'Time drags itself along like a wounded deer,' Helen says to Marpessa, 'So I am weaving pictures that tell stories.'⁴⁸ These tapestries provide a means of introducing mythic episodes that are beyond the scope of the immediate narrative. When Helen asks Marpessa, 'Do you know how it began? How it really began, long before I came into it?' she might also be speaking to readers not familiar with the causes of the conflict.⁴⁹

The Judgment of Paris

The background: reddish brown for earth; dark green for vine leaves, and foliage on trees; blue for the sky; gold thread for the stars

Paris' tunic: dark blue

Hera's robe: purple

Athena's robe: white

Aphrodite's robe: scarlet

The apple: half pale pink, half pale green⁵⁰

The description of the tapestry sets the scene for the narrative summary which follows. The myth is distilled down to its essential elements, with the colours signifying the character of the participants (regal purple for Hera, and the purity of white for Athena). Using these snatches of colour, the reader

⁴⁶ *Ithaka*. p.334

⁴⁷ Miles interprets this 'metafictional joke' as evidence that modern storytellers 'are very conscious of what they are doing in reweaving an old story.' Miles. p.232

⁴⁸ Geras, *Troy*. p.23-4

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p.24

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

is free to construct their own image of the myth. The italics convey a shift in register from the standard narrative to a more elevated form of storytelling. This device is employed on a number of occasions throughout the text, including when Troy's bard performs in honour of the fallen Hector,⁵¹ as well as during the city's destruction. This variation in font styles underscores the sense of *Troy* as a work of polyphony.

Although only the stories of the Judgement of Paris and Iphigenia's sacrifice are described in detail, the reference frame of the tapestries extends beyond the tale of Troy, with one showing Theseus fighting the Minotaur and another depicting Europa on the back of Zeus.⁵² In this way, Geras envisages Helen's walls as a kind of mythic gallery, with the tapestries functioning as portals into different parts of the mythological corpus.

The notion that a single image can convey a narrative is also explored in *Ithaka*. As in *Troy*, the loom becomes a frame through which to reference other parts of the story.⁵³ Athena charges Penelope with the task of weaving Odysseus home.⁵⁴ She uses 'the loom to imagine the places in which her husband might be',⁵⁵ and believes she has responsibility for his journey: 'the threads on her loom kept the ship afloat and her husband alive'.⁵⁶

As Barbara Clayton points out, Homer does not reveal the design of Laertes' shroud, indeed, 'based on textual evidence, there is no reason to assume that the shroud had a design at all.'⁵⁷ She believes that Homer deliberately remained silent on the matter of its design, providing both ancient listeners and contemporary authors with scope to imagine the object themselves. Furthermore, Clayton reveals that '[a]lthough logically impossible, my own preference would be to have Penelope weaving

⁵¹ Ibid. p.132-3

⁵² Ibid. p.63; 230

⁵³ The loom figures as a visual frame within the work of Rosemary Sutcliff, *The Wanderings of Odysseus: The Story of the Odyssey* (1995). Penelope, composed but sad, is depicted at her loom in the act of threading the shuttle through the framework of threads. The tapestry itself is not visible, as the top of the loom is obscured behind the block of text. The horizontal lines of the shuttle, the bars of the loom, and Penelope's arm and shoulder are reflected in the text above. The image suggests that Penelope is weaving Sutcliff's words on to her loom.

⁵⁴ The text features an epigraph by the aptly named poet Penelope Shuttle, featuring the line 'what I weave is where and how he travels'. On the significance of this passage, see Miles.p.231

⁵⁵ Geras, *Ithaka*. p.205

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Clayton. p.34

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the same tales Odysseus recounts to the Phaeaceans, as she waits for him to return.⁵⁸ *Ithaka* is a creative embodiment of Clayton's vision, although Geras multiplies the woven works of the poem so that the tapestries telling Odysseus' story are separate from the shroud. The plain white knitting of the shroud contrasts sharply with the vivid colours on Penelope's other project. As in *Troy*, the colours of the threads dominate the description.

*blue and green now
a land full of grass for pasture
caves high in the hills
something dark on the mountain*

<i>blue wool</i>	<i>thin spun green</i>	<i>one black thread for the ship</i>
<i>weft warp</i>	<i>forth back</i>	<i>weft warp</i>
<i>back forth</i>	<i>warp weft</i>	<i>back forth</i>
<i>red red red</i>	<i>yellow for the sun</i>	
<i>forth warp</i>	<i>back weft</i>	

The Cyclops Polyphemus lies asleep.
A fire burns and burns in the black cave
and flickers glad and scarlet in the dark.
Odysseus has in his hands a branch
that glows white-hot from lying in the flames.
He plunges it into the giant's head.
The Cyclops screams and stumbles to his feet
and writhes and groans and vainly tries to pluck
from his huge, melting, suppurating eye
the fiery spear on which he is impaled.
Odysseus and his men wait for dawn.

*thin watery blue egg white white
back forth weft warp*

<i>blue green</i>	<i>more blue</i>	<i>one black thread the ship</i>
<i>back forth</i>	<i>weft warp</i>	
<i>forth warp</i>	<i>back weft⁵⁹</i>	

As in *Troy*, the tapestries function as a narrative prompt for recounting other parts of the story cycle. Penelope weaves the famous episodes from Odysseus' journey, his encounter with Polyphemus,⁶⁰ the

⁵⁸ Ibid. p.34

⁵⁹ Geras, *Ithaka*. p.42

⁶⁰ Ibid.

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bag of winds,⁶¹ Circe,⁶² the Underworld,⁶³ the Sirens,⁶⁴ Scylla and Charybdis⁶⁵ and Calypso.⁶⁶ The descriptions are dreamy and poetic, yet follow the metrical rhythm of the shuttle moving back and forth.

In a revealing example of the way in which new protagonists, especially the young, are furnished with roles within myth, Klymene takes over responsibility for unpicking the shroud of Laertes each night. Preoccupied with 'weaving the story' of Odysseus home,⁶⁷ Penelope finds it too difficult to keep up with her work on the shroud as well as the tapestries for Odysseus: 'It's too much. I can't do everything...The weaving. The shroud...'⁶⁸ In 'shar[ing] the secret' and taking over the project,⁶⁹ Klymene is given an active role in the story.

After suffering from heatstroke, Klymene faints and is placed in Penelope's bed to recover.⁷⁰ Like her role in the weaving, this scene is a powerful symbol for the insertion of a created character into the very heart of the traditional story. In a significant departure from the *Odyssey*, in Geras' retelling the secret of the bed is known to everyone: 'famous in the whole of Ithaka and beyond, and travelling minstrels sang songs about it.'⁷¹ This change has the effect of opening up the story in a kind of democratisation, a sense of making Homer accessible to all. It is also a potent moment of metafiction. In acknowledging the bed's widespread renown within the poem, it also looks beyond its narrative borders, so that the allusion to the 'travelling minstrels' includes Homer himself, as well as Geras and the countless others who have retold this story including those that will in the future.

As numerous commentators have pointed out, the bed is a powerful signifier – a *sēma*, a sign - of the heart of the house, the home.⁷² Its fixity contrasts with the fluid state of the weaving that takes place

⁶¹ Ibid. p.68-9

⁶² Ibid. p.106-7

⁶³ Ibid. p.150-1

⁶⁴ Ibid. p.185-6

⁶⁵ Ibid. p.209-10

⁶⁶ Ibid. p.241

⁶⁷ Ibid. p.184

⁶⁸ Ibid. p.206

⁶⁹ Ibid. p.207

⁷⁰ Ibid. p.201

⁷¹ Ibid. p.39

⁷² 'Above all, the bed is a *sēma*' writes Froma I. Zeitlin, *Playing the Other: Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996). p.22. Later, Zeitlin highlights that like the woven works, the

on the other wooden framed object, the loom. In the *Odyssey* the unmovable bed is also a symbol of Penelope's fidelity to her husband,⁷³ and it might even be significant then that in Geras' version, in which Penelope does have an affair with Leodes, they make love not in the bed (since Klymene is asleep in it), but on the floor in front of the loom.⁷⁴ Klymene – and with her the reader – plays witness to this scene, just as she was the sole observer of Anticleia's death at the start of the novel.⁷⁵ Such moments are important indicators of the way in which contemporary retellings furnish roles for new protagonists within the structure of the narrative; playing witness to some events, and as active players at other moments. Through their identification with Klymene, young contemporary readers are able to experience these intimate scenes vicariously. It is a form of tourism, of visiting the holy, hallowed sites of myth and paying homage there.

Conclusion

This Chapter has sought to show that there is a persistent trend within children's retellings to represent the mythic tradition as a woven fabric. This is one of many ways in which these texts turn attention back upon their own storytelling practice.

In several texts, Ariadne's thread underscores the linear force of the myth tradition, linking versions of the story in a chain from past to present. Jen Cook's work reveals more complex configurations of the metaphor. Sharing an interest in the subject of female empowerment, Arachne's weaving presents opportunities for new forms of creative expression. Drawing upon the Homeric corpus, the two young adult novels of Adèle Geras locate the craft of weaving at the centre of the story. The multi-dimensional tapestries created by Helen link versions of a myth into a complex, interwoven fabric, while Penelope's story highlights the potential for the myth to be recreated anew.

design of the bed has remained unrepresented: 'No blueprint can be extracted from the details of the bed's manufacture, and in the long tradition from antiquity to the present day, no artist seems to have taken up the challenge to translate its presence into visual reality, that we may view with our own eyes' p.52

⁷³ It is interesting that at *Od.*16.33-5 the bed is described as being covered in spider webs, emphasising its lengthy neglect, but also alluding to another form of weaving. Homer, *The Odyssey*.

⁷⁴ Geras, *Ithaka*. p.203

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p.17

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Weaving is revealed as a gendered activity, traditionally associated with the work of women. Jan Lewis' decision to colour Ariadne's skein pink in *The Orchard Book of First Greek Myths* draws upon this tradition casting weaving as a female occupation, yet reframing it through contemporary iconography. As feminist critics have pointed out, women (together with children, as Chapter Three revealed) have traditionally remained silent or have been silenced in many Greek myths. Each of the stories addressed in this Chapter features a female protagonist, and weaving becomes an important part of her self-expression. The retellings of the Arachne myth by Elizabeth Spires and Kate Hovey in particular employ weaving as a means through which the character takes control of her own story.

In various ways, these texts address the relationship between text and image. Adèle Geras imagines myths as tapestries, using the colours and symbolism of a single moment to invoke the form of an extended narrative. Both authors and illustrators rise to the challenge of representing the most beautiful tapestry ever created. While some describe it in detail, others leave it up to the reader to imagine its design.

There is another weaving myth which has not been often retold for children – the story of Procne and Philomela. Like the stories addressed in this Chapter, this narrative exploits the rich connections between weaving and storytelling, voice and female empowerment, with Philomela using the tapestry to tell her story when she is unable to communicate in any other way. Yet the disturbing themes of this narrative, rape, mutilation, cannibalism and above all infanticide, render it unsuitable for young readers, although it has been frequently retold and referenced in other literary and artistic forms. The very fact of the absence of children's treatments of this story is significant, as it reveals the limits of what children should and shouldn't be exposed to.

This Chapter has shown that the mythic tradition itself is a woven entity, and the act of retelling a myth is akin to weaving it anew.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have argued that children's literature makes a major contribution to the continuation and the reshaping of the mythological tradition. Using a range of critical methods, I have examined over seventy retellings of Greek myths, most of which have been published in the last four decades. My study has included picture books which retell the myths for very young readers, mythological anthologies which feature multiple stories (both from the Greek tradition and others), and longer narratives written for young adults. Some of the stories engaged closely with ancient versions of a myth, while others referenced the Greek myths within newly created stories, set in both ancient and contemporary contexts. Though I have not attempted to produce an exhaustive catalogue of all works of children's literature which engage with Greek myth, those which I have addressed form a comprehensive sample of the genre as a whole. In the course of writing this thesis, new texts have continued to appear, confirming the ongoing influence of ancient Greek myth within this context.

I have demonstrated that there is a widespread belief, prevalent to this day, that it is important for children to be introduced to the tales of classical myth. As well as fulfilling a socialising function, these stories are regularly upheld as a means of initiating young readers into the traditions of Western culture. In acknowledgement of their important role as a major audience for myth, many contemporary retellings have emphasised the figure of the child – granting them a voice and ways to witness, and even participate in, the world of myth. The texts consistently seek to highlight myth's contemporary relevance, as well as the close connection between past and present. They revel in the freedom to rework and invent the details of the stories, but do remain limited by the established narrative frameworks of ancient sources. Most significantly, recent retellings are highly self-conscious about the storytelling tradition and repeatedly make reference to their own place within it. Intertextual and metafictional moments feature in many texts, so that they anticipate their own future, ensuring that these ancient tales will continue to be told and retold. For these reasons, I have sought to demonstrate that these works are a significant publishing phenomenon, and are deserving of sustained scholarly and critical attention.

The threads of this thesis are tied up, yet a few final questions persist. Why Greek myth? Why is it that as a culture we keep on returning to these stories from so long ago and so far away? On a more personal level, what is it about these tales that strikes such a chord with me?

Conclusion

Nadia Wheatley supplies a possible answer to these questions in her short story 'Melting Point'. She suggests that the temporal and spatial distance between now and then are not as vast as they might appear, and shows that the myth of Icarus has both relevance and resonance in a contemporary context. Furthermore, her work elides the supposed gulf between myth and reality; Xenia reflects that 'as all the oceans of the world ultimately join together, some of the water here in Sydney Harbour could once have been in that very sea where Icarus fell.'¹ Through the course of this thesis, it has become clear to me that the Greek myths reveal as much about contemporary culture as they do about antiquity.²

Wheatley's work is especially significant in that she confronts Greek myth from an Australian perspective, just as I do. Throughout this thesis I have sought to give particular attention to Australian authors who have engaged with the Greek myths, a group which also includes Maurice Saxby, Ian Trevaskis and Jennifer Cook. They are a small party, and not all of them actively interrogate their cultural background within their creative writing to the extent that Wheatley does. It is in Maurice Saxby's academic work, rather than his storytelling, that he reveals an awareness of these issues. He writes of the importance of children's literature that is 'embedded in an Australian ethos, provide[s] Australian children with access to their own culture and social history, and help[s] develop a sense of national identity.'³ The corpus of classical myth is a part of this identity, not only for those of Greek heritage, but in a broader context too, as my own affinity with these stories attests.⁴

The tales have a timeless appeal, retaining their relevance in contexts that are far removed from their origins.⁵ They are infinitely adaptable, a bare-boned frame upon which storytellers can hang their own versions. This metaphor is evoked with particular power in the stories that feature the act and art of weaving. As Chapter Nine explored, these tales are themselves woven on to the loom of the

¹ Wheatley. p.237

² In the Preface to the second edition of her seminal work *Women in Greek Myth*, Mary Lefkowitz writes that '[o]ften, when we seek to talk about the past, what we end up prmetamoring is a new portrait of ourselves and our own modern concerns.' Mary R. Lefkowitz, *Women in Greek Myth* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986; 2007). p.ix

³ Saxby, *Books in the Life of a Child: Bridges to Literature and Learning*. p.9ff.

⁴ Marcel Detienne believes that '[i]n mythology everyone feels more or less at home'. Marcel Detienne, *The Creation of Mythology* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1981; 1986). p.ix

⁵ '[T]he reworking of myth exemplifies the enduring power of the past.' Zajko. p.401

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mythic tradition. Above all, they exemplify what it is that makes a story great. I think that this idea is at the heart of their endurance.

The extended tradition of retelling these tales has taken a self-reflexive turn, as John Stephens and Robyn McCallum recognise, becoming 'grounded in a self-consciousness that what is represented is not merely story but a process of signification.'⁶ The prominence of metafictional elements invites a reader to consider the power of the mythic tradition and their own place within it. In this way, these ancient stories have been refashioned as a postmodern phenomenon, with the reader regularly 'asked to be aware of the constructing author, of the artifice of the piece' as Julie Sanders describes.⁷ Contemporary storytellers now regularly play around with the form and detail of the myths, making new stories out of very old ones.

The motif of play has emerged numerous times in my investigation.⁸ As Ellen Donovan highlights, Nathaniel Hawthorne, the first storyteller to retell the Greek myths for children, was upfront about the fact that he was playing with their form.⁹ More recently, Ian Trevaskis uses the child's game 'hopscotch' as the means by which his characters enter the world of myth in *Medusa Stone*.¹⁰ In *Shadow of the Minotaur*, Alan Gibbons develops a contemporary context for this notion by locating his form of playing myth on a computer.¹¹ Maria Nikolajeva writes that 'metafiction involves a game with the reader'¹² and contends that these sorts of moments self-consciously allude to the playfulness of an author reworking a mythic narrative. The tales are open to, and in fact invite, a clever and even comic approach. To my mind the most successful reworkings are not always those that retain fidelity to an ancient source (as Antoinette Brazouski and Mary J. Klatt believe),¹³ but those that manage to capture the fundamental essence of the myth and yet fashion it into something original. Myth has

⁶ Stephens and McCallum. p.89

⁷ Sanders. p.64

⁸ Rebecca Lukens refers to postmodern children's literature as 'a semiotic playground' in which readers can have fun. Lukens, Smith, and Coffel. p.38

⁹ Donovan. p.23

¹⁰ Ian Trevaskis, *Hopscotch: Medusa Stone* (Newtown: Walker Books Australia, 2009).

¹¹ Gibbons.

¹² Nikolajeva, *Children's Literature Comes of Age: Towards a New Aesthetic*. p.192

¹³ Brazouski and Klatt. p.xi

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always been protean and it is clear that many modern writers of children's literature comprehend this notion.¹⁴

A project of this scale inevitably comes to reflect much of the personality of its maker.¹⁵ As my Introduction revealed, this thesis topic has deeply personal foundations, with its genesis in my childhood fascination with the myths of the Greek heroes and the tale of Troy. The stories struck a chord with me as a young girl, and gave me an appetite for pursuing new versions of the same old narratives. Ultimately, they have led me to investigate the phenomenon itself, and to critique both my attachment to these stories and their proliferation.

More recently, I have been able to participate in the process of passing on the stories to the next generation. This thesis has taken me a substantial time to complete, and through its course I have had three children of my own. Introducing my children Leo, Miles and Audrey (now aged five, three and one) to some of the Greek myths has been an exciting and illuminating experience. Bruno Bettelheim writes that '[n]aturally a parent will begin by telling or reading to his child a tale the parent himself or herself cared for as a child, or cares for now.'¹⁶ Having begun with the work of Rosemary Wells, Saviour Pirotta, and Jane Yolen, I look forward to reading to Leo and his younger siblings more complex versions as they grow. I am, of course, careful not to assume that they will love them as I did and still do.

I also have to admit that, while subscribing to the theory that it is important to expose young children to the darker side of life within the contained world of story, I have hesitated at sharing some of the more grisly, scary moments.¹⁷ While age categories seem a simplistic way of delineating children's literature, it does seem natural to wait until my children are a few years older before introducing some of the more violent stories from the corpus.

¹⁴ 'What we call 'Greek myth' is no featureless monolith, but multifaceted, multifarious and multivalent, a fluid phenomenon.' Roger D. Woodard, "Muthoi in Continuity and Variation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Mythology*, ed. Roger D. Woodard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). p.1

¹⁵ Martin Winkler believes that 'modern uses of ancient texts say something about ourselves.' Martin. M. Winkler, "Greek Myth on the Screen," in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Mythology*, ed. Roger D. Woodard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). p.454

¹⁶ Bettelheim. p.17-8.

¹⁷ Ibid. p.7

Conclusion

The first section of this thesis, Chapters One to Three, concentrated on the figure of the child. It examined contemporary children as the inheritors of the mythic tradition, the next generation to which these age old tales are being passed down. The belief that these are stories that the young ought to know remains persistent. The myths not only contain important moral and social lessons, they also contain tropes found throughout Western culture. All this is beyond their immediate substance as pure entertainment. I examined the roles that children play in myth. Traditionally silenced or victimised in some way, the young have been given active and important roles in the mythic fabric. Their elevated status speaks directly to the young readers of children's versions of myth. Child protagonists witness crucial events allowing young readers to experience them vicariously. The dynamic between a child and their parent was seen to be a favourite theme in numerous myths, and the lens of psychoanalysis exposed the inherent tensions in the relationship. Again, the interplay between child and adult within the mythic narrative was found to reflect the circumstances of the reader, with many texts intended to be a shared reading experience by a child and parent.

The central trio of Chapters Four to Six, sought to pin down the specifics of the world of myth. It studied the restrictions and the liberties of rewriting established narrative. The act of experiencing a familiar story reworked in a new way can be deeply emotive. It is clear that much of the appeal of contemporary retellings of ancient myth relates to the way in which they engage with the mythic tradition. In Chapter Four I explored the notion of rewriting, examining how much a tale can be changed before it ceases to be a retelling at all.¹⁸ Throughout this project I have consistently concentrated on narratives that overtly position themselves as part of the mythic tradition, although there are numerous examples of more oblique referencing, both in children's literature and beyond.

This section went on to examine the topography of the space in which myth takes place and noted a series of common tropes which storytellers draw upon to conjure up the sense of the mythological. It also addressed aspects of the relationship between the present and the past, which a number of narratives render navigable through the magic of time travel. Elsewhere, the recurring trope in which the immortal Greek gods survive into modern times provides an opportunity to explore another kind

¹⁸ Zajko speaks of 'the tensions inherent in the 're-' of rewriting: if the new 'version' of a myth changes its emphasis sufficiently radically, it may become difficult to associate it with the tradition.' Zajko. p.397

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of temporal collision. At the heart of these kinds of tales is the desire to demonstrate myth's eternal relevance, to highlight the proximity of this other world to our own.

Further research in this area would uncover important connections between storytelling traditions. I touched upon the implications of cross-cultural anthologies only briefly, but noted the bias in collections such as Maurice Saxby's *The Great Deeds of the Superheroes*, in which western narratives greatly outnumber those from non-western contexts.¹⁹ Stephens and McCallum suspect that the 'implicit centrality of Greek myth...is a factor of numbers, space, and range,'²⁰ prompting important questions about the privileging of certain kinds of narrative form. The preferences of author, publisher and reader all play a part in this process, which inevitably becomes self-perpetuating.

The third and final section, Chapters Seven to Nine, addressed the idea of the text from a number of different perspectives. In addition to investigating the text from the interior, concentrating on the recurring motif of weaving, it devoted attention to external frames and formats, from the micro level of the paratext to the structures and institutions which determine its publication, sale and acquisition. The exploration of the way in which these texts operate within the real world brought a new perspective to what could purely have been a work of literary criticism. There is scope to investigate this line of enquiry further, with more expansive research into the ways in which libraries and booksellers obtain, promote and utilise mythic retellings.

Michael Cadden has written that '[c]hildren learn early, whether through experience or the hasty page-turning by tired parents reading to them, the place of the peritext – both literally and figuratively.'²¹ From their earliest encounters with books, my children have demonstrated a keen interest in paratextual and peritextual elements. This research has made me more mindful of the significance of these elements and rather than being one of the page turning parents Cadden refers to, my husband and I have often spent time discussing the significance of the colophon, dedication page and illustrated endpapers. My sons Leo and Miles are particularly fascinated with books whose back covers promote other texts in the same series or by the same publishing group, a device which I have come to realise is a deliberate, even aggressive, marketing strategy. Even so, when it comes to

¹⁹ Saxby, *The Great Deeds of the Superheroes*.

²⁰ Stephens and McCallum. p.65

²¹ Cadden. p.viii

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mythological retellings, this type of cross-referencing actively encourages further engagement with the mythic tradition, which has to be celebrated.

During the course of this research project, two recurring images have emerged, each of which embodies the way that myth has come down to us today. The first image, with which Chapter One opens, is a box. It is sturdy, solid, and enduring. Contained inside are the stories of Greek myth, a treasure trove of tales waiting for a new generation of young readers to open and discover. Like the spine on a book, the lid of the chest hinges open to reveal the contents preserved inside. This image is loaded with all the implications of the numerous boxes that feature within the corpus of Greek mythology, from the mixed blessings contained within Pandora's box, to the close bond between mother and child that sustains Danae and Perseus as they float upon the sea in their locked chest.

The other image, with which Chapter Nine draws the threads of this thesis together, is a woven tapestry. As noted in the Chapter summary above, the arts of weaving and storytelling are frequently tied together. From Arachne to Philomela, the many weavers of Greek myth have much to say about their craft, and retellings of their stories are alert to the wider implications of these connections. Their self-awareness serves as a reminder to me of my own act of weaving words as I attempt to make sense of the significance of these stories.

I have come to conceive of the mythic tradition as an interwoven fabric of different retellings of the same few stories. Many of the texts display the same sort of recognition of other versions of the tales they tell. Rather than assert their singularity, they actively encourage readers to seek out other accounts. The appeal and humour of many recent publications relies on knowledge of prior treatments. In this way, the tradition self-perpetuates, and readers are continually reminded of the bigger picture. In some cases, however, it is less clear whether authors are deliberately using metafiction in their work, or if such elements feature without the direct intervention. Could it be that myth quite naturally lends itself to metafiction? After all, mythology is both the story and the study.²²

²² '[I]t is more than usually difficult to impose a sharp distinction between 'a myth' and 'a reception of a myth'.
'Zajko and O'Gorman. p.10

Conclusion

It is relatively easy to criticise the artistic output of others, far less so to put oneself out there for scrutiny. One day I do hope to write my own Greek myth story for young readers. Through it I will try to represent in creative form some of the findings of this academic project. The shape of the narrative remains indeterminate, but I think that it will involve children from the modern day coming into contact with the realm of myth. I imagine that a book, or many books, will be the catalyst for the encounter.

Back when I was eight, and the world of Greek myth first opened up to me via Roger Lancelyn Green, I doubt that I paid much attention to the paratextual elements of his works that I now know, courtesy of Gérard Genette, to be so significant.²³ Nevertheless at some point in my childhood I must have read the final paragraph of his Author's Note in *Tales of the Greek Heroes*, where he writes:

[The Greek] stories are part of the world's heritage, they are part of the background of our literature, our speech, of our very thoughts. We cannot come to them too early, nor are we ever likely to outgrow them...Once found, the magic web of old Greek myth and legend is ours by right – and ours for life.²⁴

In identifying their significant cultural value, the way in which they resonate with young readers, and in employing the language of weaving to describe their interconnectedness, Green elegantly articulates the preoccupations of my research. I cannot wait to read him with my own children.

²³ Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*.

²⁴ Green, *Tales of the Greek Heroes*. p.200-1.

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