Miriam Riverlea, "Entry on: The Tale of Troy by Roger Lancelyn Green, Betty Middleton-Sandford ", peer-reviewed by Elizabeth Hale and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1103. Entry version as of November 07, 2026.

Roger Lancelyn Green , Betty Middleton-Sandford

The Tale of Troy

United Kingdom (1958)

TAGS: Achilles Aeneas Aeneid Agamemnon Ajax / Aias Andromache Antenor Aphrodite Apollo Athena Calchas Circe Clytemnestra Cyclops / Cyclopes Diomedes (Son of Tydeus) Epic Cycle Eris Hector Hecuba Helen Hera Heracles Hercules Hermes Hermione Homer Iliad Iphigenia / Iphigeneia Laocoon Menelaus Neoptolemus Nestor Odysseus / Ulysses Palamedes Paris (Trojan Prince) Patroclus Peleus Philoctetes Priam Prometheus Sinon Sirens Thetis Tiresias Trojan Horse Trojan War Troy Zeus



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General information	
Title of the work	The Tale of Troy
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1958
First Edition Details	Roger Lancelyn Green, *The Tale of Troy*. Illustrated by Betty Middleton-Sandford, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1958, 171 pp.
ISBN	9787050018919
Genre	Action and adventure fiction, Juvenile fiction*, Mythological fiction
Target Audience	Children
Author of the Entry	Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com

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Creators



Roger Lancelyn Green , 1918 - 1987
(Author)

Roger Lancelyn Green was born in Norwich, England, into a privileged and historic English family. He studied for a B. Litt. at Oxford University. CS Lewis was one of his tutors and Green became a member of the Inklings literary group along with Lewis and JRR Tolkien. Green remained close friends with Lewis throughout his life, including going on holidays in Greece. Green is credited with inventing the name *The Chronicles of Narnia* for Lewis' famous fantasy series.

Green became a university librarian and scholar of English literature, delivering the Andrew Lang lecture as part of a fellowship at the University of St Andrews in 1968. He published biographies of Lang, JM Barrie and CS Lewis, as well as researching the lives of Hans Christian Andersen and Lewis Carroll. In addition, between the late 1940s and the 1970s he wrote numerous retellings of myths and legends for children, including tales from the Classical, Egyptian, and Norse traditions, as well as the tales of King Arthur and Robin Hood. While most of the works are traditional retellings, *The Luck of Troy* (1961) is an original story focalised through the perspective of the boy Nicostratus, son of Helen and Menelaus, who grows up in Troy.

His son, Richard Lancelyn Green (1953-2004), also became an academic, and is regarded as a world-renowned expert on the work of Arthur Conan Doyle and the character of Sherlock Holmes.

Sources:

Profile at goodreads.com (accessed: September 15, 2020).

Profile at en.wikipedia.org (accessed: September 15, 2020).

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Bio prepared by Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com



Betty Middleton-Sandford (Illustrator)

Betty Middleton-Sandford was a British artist and book illustrator of the mid 20th century. Her simple, naïve, black and white line drawings feature in early editions of Green's *Tales of the Greek Heroes* (1958) and *The Tale of Troy* (1958). She also contributed the illustrations for Naomi Mitchison's *The Young Alexander the Great*, published in 1960. Her depictions of the gods and heroes draw upon the profiles of classical vase painting, and her drawings convey texture and detail via repeated patterns of swirls, lines and dots.

Bio prepared by Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com

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Additional information

Translation

Chinese: *Teluoyi chuan qi*, trans. Tifu Xing and Yanquan Wu, Beijing Shi: Wai yu jiao xue yu yan jiu chu ban she, 1988.

Persian: *Afsānah-'i Trūā*, trans. 'Abbās Aqājānī, Tihrān: Surūsh, 1379, 2000.

Spanish: *La historia de Troya*, trans. José Sánchez Compañy, Madrid: Ediciones Siruela, 2006.

Thai: □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□, ill. Pauline Baynes, trans. Pathum Thani: Kiriboon, 2011.

Summary

Roger Lancelyn Green's *The Tale of Troy* stresses that the origins of the Trojan War go right back to the beginning of Zeus' reign, when Prometheus prophesised that the sea nymph Thetis would give birth to a son who would grow up to be greater than his father. In order to preserve his power, Zeus changed his mind about being Thetis' consort, and instead arranged for her to be married to the minor hero Peleus. All the Olympians attended the celebration, except for Eris, the goddess of strife, who turned up invited to toss a golden apple inscribed "For the Fairest" on to the table. Knowing it unwise to choose between Hera, Athena and Aphrodite, Zeus instead arranges that the Trojan herdsman Paris, known for his honesty and fairness, award the apple. Each of the three goddesses offers a bribe, but in the end he selects Aphrodite, who promises him the most beautiful woman in the world, Helen of Sparta.

Aphrodite's manipulation continues throughout the saga. Green casts Helen as a victim of the gods' machinations and the desires of men. Gradually Aphrodite's spell wears off so that she is left full of sadness and shame for what she has done. Her culpability for so much suffering is symbolised by the Star-stone, a special ruby necklace that is waiting for her when she arrives in Troy. It weeps blood-red drops onto her white robes that, in a lyrical refrain repeated throughout the story, "fell and vanished – fell and vanished – and left no stain." (p. 36) Helen is the cause of the war, but her beautiful form bears no trace of her crime, and she goes on to live a happy life when finally reunited with Menelaus.

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The events of Homer's *Iliad* form the centrepiece of Green's story, detailing the conflict between hot-headed Achilles and cowardly Agamemnon, who repeatedly urges the Greeks to give up and go home, and the tragic deaths of Patroclus and Hector. But as he outlines in his Author's Note, it was his intention to retell the "whole Adventure of Troy" (p. 167), and he draws upon numerous other classical sources, both widely known and obscure, to retell other episodes within the saga as if it was a single narrative. Many concern the fulfilment of prophesies, from the sacrifice of Agamemnon's daughter Iphigeneia at Aulis before the fleet can sail, to the fetching of the wounded archer Philoctetes who carries the bow of Heracles, to Odysseus' theft of the Palladium, which must be removed from Troy before the city will fall. The construction and deployment of the wooden horse is described in detail. The battle scenes and the sacking of the city are vividly retold but without graphic violence.

Following the fall of Troy, the final section of the book recounts the *Nostoi* of the Greek victors and the journeys of the surviving Trojans as they seek new homes. Significantly, Odysseus' journey is condensed into two short chapters, focusing on his encounters with the Cyclops and Circe, the Sirens and Calypso, before very briefly recounting his return to Ithaca and recovery of his palace from the suitors. Green calls Odysseus "the last of the Heroes" (p. 162) and uses the fragments from the lost poems of the Epic Cycle to recount the story of his death, in old age, and "from the sea" (p. 163), as Tiresias had prophesised. Green uses his death to pinpoint the moment "where history begins and legend ends" (p. 162).

Analysis

One of the most compelling aspects of Green's *Tale of Troy* is the way in which he ties together disparate material – from well known epic and tragedy, alongside more obscure fragments from lost sources and late summaries – to present the saga of the Trojan war as a unified narrative. With the small exception of the medieval story of Troilus and Cressida, he maintains that he has "full Classical authority for everything in this book" (p. 168). Each source is given equal weight, with contradictions elided or reworked. For example, the alternate tradition of Helen's *eidolon* is made part of the story of Menelaus and Helen's adventures on the way home from Troy.

Heroism is celebrated as a primary virtue, and each warrior emerges with particular character traits. Achilles is young, rash, and

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passionate. Agamemnon is cowardly, despite his leadership role, while his brother Menelaus is both noble and affable, a deserving husband for Helen. Ajax has superhuman strength and size but is deeply hurt when Odysseus is awarded the armour of Achilles. And Odysseus himself is wily, brave, and ultimately the most appealing of all of the heroes. Green amplifies his friendship with Diomedes in recounting their shared exploits, including the exposure of Achilles while dressed as a girl on Scyros, the Doloneia, missions to collect Philoctetes and Neoptolemus, and the theft of the Palladium. With the exception of Helen, female characters are limited to playing supporting roles within the action, featuring predominantly as wives, daughters, and witches. Green does not actively interrogate their subordinate roles within the story.

The city of Troy is itself a character within the narrative, with Green retelling the story of Poseidon and Apollo building the city walls and the city's sacking by Heracles in the previous generation. There are references linking the world of myth to the archaeological record, including Odysseus sneaking in to the city via a drain "that may be seen at Troy to this day" (p. 93). Troy is magnificent, and its royal family full of confidence, but the city's downfall is less a result of hubris, than the victim of Zeus' intention to bring the age of heroes to a close. Green explains that after the Greeks sack Troy it was rebuilt, but the later settlements never lasted long. Nevertheless, it became a place destined "to live forever in song and story, and to stir our imaginations even to this day" (p. 116).

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Achilles Aeneas Aeneid Agamemnon Ajax / Aias Andromache Antenor Aphrodite Apollo Athena Calchas Circe Clytemnestra Cyclops / Cyclopes Diomedes (Son of Tydeus) Epic Cycle Eris Hector Hecuba Helen Hera Heracles Hercules Hermes Hermione Homer Iliad Iphigenia / Iphigeneia Laocoon Menelaus Neoptolemus Nestor Odysseus / Ulysses Palamedes Paris (Trojan Prince) Patroclus Peleus Philoctetes Priam Prometheus Sinon Sirens Thetis Tiresias Trojan Horse Trojan War Troy Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Character traits Conflict Death Emotions Heroism Prediction/prophecy Storytelling Tradition Violence War

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Further Reading	Roger Lancelyn Green, *The Tale of Troy* at books.google.com (accessed: September 15, 2020). Riverlea, Miriam, *My First Book of Greek Myths: Retelling Ancient Myths to Modern Children*, Monash University, 2017, (Thesis, accessed: September 15, 2020).
Addenda	Introductions by children's authors Rick Riordan in the 2009 edition and by Michelle Paver in the 2012 edition both comment on the influence of Green's retellings on young readers. The changing styles of cover art is also interesting over the sixty years the book has been in print.

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