Robin Diver, "Entry on: Tales of Ancient Greece by Enid Blyton, Chris Price", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1130. Entry version as of October 31, 2026.

Enid Blyton , Chris Price

Tales of Ancient Greece

United Kingdom (1930)

TAGS: Apollo Arachne Arion (Poet) Baucis Ceres Clytie Cupid Daphne Echo Epimetheus Hyacinth Io Juno Jupiter Minerva Narcissus Pandora Phaethon Philemon Pluto / Plouton Proserpina Psyche Zephyrus





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Tales of Ancient Greece
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1930
First Edition Details	Enid Blyton, *Tales of Ancient Greece*. London: George Newnes, 1930, 127 pp.
ISBN	1901881679
Genre	Anthology*, Fiction, Myths
Target Audience	Children
Author of the Entry	Robin Diver, University of Birmingham, robin.diver@hotmail.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Creators



Enid Blyton , 1897 - 1968
(Author)

Enid Mary Blyton trained as a teacher and worked as a teacher and governess before becoming a professional children's author following the publication of a collection of poems, *Child Whispers*, in 1922. She published extensively, with an output estimated at between 600-700 books and stories. For the first fifteen years these stories were largely versions of traditional myths and other familiar stories, while more original stories followed. Even the original stories were often heavily influenced by myth. *The Enchanted Wood* (1939), for example, was heavily influenced by Norse myth. Many of Blyton's stories focused on children's adventure. This included her most famous series, the *Famous Five*, which began appearing in the 1940s and ran to over twenty titles. *The Secret Seven* series also focused on mystery adventure stories with child protagonists. Blyton is also well-known for her school series, *The Naughtiest Girl*, *Malory Towers*, and *St. Clare's*, and for her stories for younger children centred on the character, Noddy.

There has been criticism of Blyton's work, focused largely upon their limited vocabulary and upon their use of racist and sexist stereotypes. The books remain popular, however; frequently reissued and, particularly *Noddy* and the *Famous Five*, adapted for television.

Source:

Bio at the oxforddnb.com (accessed: July 4, 2018).

Bio prepared by Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood... The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.



Chris Price (Illustrator)

Little conclusive material can be found about Chris Price, who was perhaps an in-house illustrator for the publisher. The British Library Catalogue ascribes *Tales of Ancient Greece* to the illustrator Christine Price; however, since her dates are given as 1928 – 1980 (meaning she was born two years before this book's publication), either the birth date or assignment are presumably incorrect. Christine Price illustrated certain works of Henry Treece and is the creator of the *Made In* book series, which includes *Made in Ancient Greece* (1967) and *Made in Ancient Egypt* (1970). The copyright to Price's illustrations was renewed on the 1998 edition in 1998; this copyright renewal does not appear for Blyton.

Sources:

British Library Catalogue (accessed: September 22, 2020).

Bio prepared by Robin Diver, University of Birmingham, RSD253@student.bham.ac.uk

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Additional information

Summary

This is a short collection of Greek myths retold for children. They are related in fairly simple language, mostly adapted closely from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The illustrations take the form of black and white line drawings depicting key moments in the chapters.

- Pandora and the Whispering Box.
- Phaeton and the Sun-Horses.
- Proserpina and the King of the Underworld.
- The Maiden of the Laurel Tree (Daphne and Apollo)
- The Watchman with a Hundred Eyes (Io and Argus).
- The Story of Echo and Narcissus.
- The King with the Golden Touch (Midas).
- The Story of Orpheus and Eurydice.
- Clytie, the Sunflower Maiden.
- The Story of Baucis and Philemon.
- The Statue that Came to Life (Pygmalion and Galatea).
- The Story of Hyacinthus.
- The Story of Cupid and Psyche.
- The Wings of Icarus.
- The Boastful Spinner (Arachne).
- Arion and the Dolphin.

Analysis

This anthology is a somewhat early work by immensely successful children's author Enid Blyton, published during the 1930s period in which she focused on myth and folklore. In contrast to popular 1920s myth anthologies, which adapted myth loosely (e.g. Winder 1923; Price 1924; Crawford and Crawford 1929), this book sticks closer to the stories found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. We can thus see the beginnings of the move to the focus on perceived "accuracy" to ancient myth in the mid-twentieth century, found in the anthologies of e.g. Hamilton 1942; Warner 1950 and Coolidge 1949.

Whilst Blyton does not explicitly turn adult mythical characters into children as, for example, Nathaniel Hawthorne does (*A Wonder Book for Girls and Boys* 1851), she consistently shows adult characters behaving in a childlike way. Presumably, this is to make them more relatable to the audience. For example, Psyche runs around in Cupid's garden playing with the flowers and birds. Pandora and Epimetheus

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

are always outside dancing, and when Pandora is absorbed with the box Epimetheus begs her "to come and play with him" (p. 3). Whilst they are described as married and Pandora is depicted as an adult in the illustrations, Pandora is also called a "maiden", which sometimes means virgin. This adapting of characters as childlike is quite common for anthologies of this period (e.g. Daphne as child in Crawford and Crawford 1929), but would become less popular in the mid-twentieth century works.

The Pandora retelling also arguably draws on the Garden of Eden, or perhaps ideas of a lost "primitive golden age". We may be meant to interpret this as an Edenic world without sexuality until the release of the sorrows. Pandora and Epimetheus start out at one with nature, living in a house of branches and leaves. The story also shows the ideas of white as good and anything else as bad for which Blyton is controversial. The sorrows that come from the box are always called "the brown-winged creatures", whilst Hope, when she emerges, is "not a brown-winged creature, but a little snowy-winged spirit" who heals people by "brushing the wounds on their skin with her snowy wings'" (p. 7).

Mythical stories of adultery are somewhat obscured, but there are hints for those in the know. For example, Jupiter admires Io very much and comes to earth to visit her, but is afraid Juno will be jealous. He thus hides in a cloud "so that she might not see him talking to Io" (p. 31). After Io is taken prisoner by Hera, Jupiter does not seem upset she is a prisoner so much as that she is no longer beautiful. "He could not bear to think that the lovely nymph was a heifer, and he longed to change her back to her own form." (p. 34). This suggests at the uncensored mythical version, some of Jupiter's assumed gallantry from the opening disappearing.

Adultery is again obscured in the Echo and Narcissus retelling. Echo, rather than distracting Juno with her talk so Juno will not discover Jupiter with nymphs, simply talks too much to Juno, is "rebuked" and "answered the goddess rudely" (p. 37), for which she is punished. Narcissus in this version is called "vain" but comes across more as socially insecure. He thinks that when Echo repeats his lines back to him, she is mocking him. He thus angrily tells her she is pretending to love him, and "your friends are behind the trees, laughing" (p. 39). After this, Echo's curse that he will "love in vain, and know what pain it was" (p. 39) seems rather cruel. The narrative acknowledges this at the end, having Echo eventually regret her wish when she sees

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Narcissus suffering, and grieve that her own curse makes her unable to warn him.

The didactic message that money does not bring happiness in the Midas retelling is particularly pronounced. The final sentence is: "Thus was Midas cured of his greed for gold, and learnt that riches do not bring a man happiness or peace." (p. 49). This message is also emphasised throughout the Baucis and Philemon retelling. Here it is additionally implied that wealth, power and beauty are (wrongly) the goals of most people. When Jupiter offers the couple a wish after seeing that they are good, he expects them to ask for a palace, wealth or youth, and is much surprised when they ask to die at the same time.

Jupiter's assumption about what the couple will ask for does not appear in most other retellings, and it is therefore interesting he assumes they will ask for wealth and power at the highest level. The possibility they might ask for a level of wealth that would keep them safe from discomfort without putting them at the top of any social hierarchies, which might be viewed as less unreasonable by the child reader, is not considered. The combination of these Midas and Baucis and Philemon myths perhaps promotes something of a conservative mindset. Midas, a rich king, must learn to be content with the (great) amounts of wealth he has and not seek more; learning to avoid materialism does not mean disdaining the wealth he already has, however. Baucis and Philemon, an old peasant couple, are rightly happy with what they have and do not want more. The consistent message is that people should be happy with their own wealth and power, not looking to either increase or decrease it. There is, perhaps, a resulting implication people in real life should also be happy with their born social station.

In the Orpheus retelling, Orpheus turns back to gaze at Eurydice too soon not because he distrusts Pluto but because he wonders whether some of Eurydice's beauty has faded in the Underworld.

Apollo is probably the overall main character of the anthology, and Blyton presents a somewhat unusual view of him. Whilst other children's anthologies emphasise Apollo's beauty in a more feminine way (e.g. Margaret Evans Price *A Child's Book of Myths and Enchantment Tales* 1924; Geraldine McCaughrean *The Orchard Book of Greek Myths* 1992; James Baldwin *Old Greek Stories* 1895), and others emphasise his cultured or musical associations (e.g. *The*

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myth 1962; Bernard Evslin *Heroes, Gods and Monsters of the Greek Myths* 1967; Rick Riordan 2014 *Percy Jackson's Greek Gods* and the accompanying novels), here Apollo's masculine strength and how beautiful this makes him is the focus when he is described. Clytie fantasises about Apollo's "strength and his beauty" (p. 57). When Apollo pursues Daphne, he is called "fierce and full of love" and "strong and tireless" (p. 28).

For a retelling of this period, the queer elements in the story of Hyacinthus are surprisingly explicit. Hyacinthus "was greatly loved by the god Apollo" and Zephyrus also "loved Hyacinthus, and was jealous because the youth liked Apollo best." (p. 72). Apollo takes the dying Hyacinthus in his arms, and Zephyrus, later regretting what he has caused, caresses the flowers that grow from Hyacinthus' blood "endlessly" (p. 73).

In places there is influence from classical art. For example, in one illustration showing Cupid shooting Daphne with his bow, Daphne appears to be a trace of the goddess Flora from the fresco at the Villa of Ariadne in Stabiae. This is a curious choice, since copying the Flora image means Daphne is now shown picking flowers, even though this is tonally inconsistent with her portrayal in the text as a strong tomboyish huntress.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Apollo Arachne Arion (Poet) Baucis Ceres Clytie Cupid Daphne Echo Epimetheus Hyacinth Io Juno Jupiter Minerva Narcissus Pandora Phaethon Philemon Pluto / Plouton Proserpina Psyche Zephyrus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Animals Hierarchy LGBTQI Love Morality Nature
Further Reading	Baldwin, James, *Old Greek Stories*, New York: American Book Company, 1895 (accessed: September 22, 2020).

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Coolidge, Olivia E., *Greek Myths*, 1969. Reprint, New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1997.

Crawford, John Raymond, *Greek Tales for Tiny Tots*, Bloomington, Indiana: Public School Publishing Company, 1929.

D'Aulaire, Ingri and Parin, Edgar, *D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths*, 1962. Reprint, New York, NY: Delacorte Press, 2003.

Evslin, Bernard, *Heroes, Gods and Monsters of the Greek Myths*, 1966. Reprint, New York, NY: Bantam, 1998.

Hamilton, Edith, *Mythology*, 1942. Reprint, New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing, 2011.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel, *A Wonder Book for Boys and Girls*, edited by EriK Publications and illustrations by Walter Crane, 1851. Reprint, Boston, Massachusetts: EriK Publications, 2015.

McCaughrean, G., *The Orchard Book of Greek Myths*, ill. Emma Chichester Clark, London: Orchard Books, 1992.

Price, Margaret Evans, *A Child's Book of Myths and Enchantment Tales*, 1924. Reprint, New York, NY: Checkerboard Press, 1993.

Riordan, Rick, *Percy Jackson's Greek Gods*, New York: Hyperion, 2014.

Warner, Rex, *Men and Gods: Myths and Legends of the Ancient Greeks*, ill. Edward Gorey, 1950. Reprint, New York, NY: New York Review Books, 2008.

Winder, Blanche, *Once Upon a Time: Children's Stories from the Classics*, ill. Harry G. Theaker, London and Melbourne: Ward, Lock & Co. Limited, 1923.

Addenda

Blyton is one of the most translated British children's authors.

This entry is based on: Enid Blyton, *Tales of Ancient Greece*, Dorset: Element Children's Books, 1998.

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Robin Diver, "Entry on: Tales of Ancient Greece by Enid Blyton, Chris Price", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1130. Entry version as of October 31, 2026.

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.