Charlotte Farrell, "Entry on: King Midas's Golden Touch by Julia Jarman, Claudia Venturini", peer-reviewed by Elizabeth Hale and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1343. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

Julia Jarman , Claudia Venturini

King Midas's Golden Touch

United Kingdom (2009)

TAGS: Dionysus / Dionysos Golden Touch Metamorphosis Midas Satyr(s) Silens





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

General information	
Title of the work	King Midas's Golden Touch
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	Australia, United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2009
First Edition Details	Julia Jarman, Claudia Venturini, *King Midas's Golden Touch*, "Hopscotch Myths". London: Franklin Watts, 2009, 31 pp.
ISBN	9780749685850
Genre	Mythological fiction, Picture books
Target Audience	Children
Author of the Entry	Charlotte Farrell, University of New England, charlottefarrell@gmail.com
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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



Julia Jarman , b. 1946
(Author)

Julia Jarman is a children and young adult fiction writer born in the UK. She has written over 80 books for children. Jarman studied English and Drama at Manchester University after which she worked as a teacher. Her children, grandchildren, and love of animals inspire many of her books for which she has won the Stockport Children's Book award, twice. Jarman lives in a village sixty miles north of London.

Sources:

Author's website (accessed: July 5, 2021).

Author's profile on Penguin (accessed: July 5, 2021).

Author's profile on Hachette, (accessed: July 5, 2021).

Bio prepared by Charlotte Farrell, University of New England, charlottefarrell@gmail.com



Claudia Venturini (Illustrator)

Claudia Venturini is an Italian children's book illustrator living and working in Ferrara. After a long career as an illustrator and graphic designer in advertising, as well as working as an educator, in 2004 she began to more fully focus on illustrating children's books.

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Source:

Author's profile on Child's Play (accessed: July 5, 2021).

Bio prepared by Charlotte Farrell, University of New England, charlottefarrell@gmail.com

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Additional information

Summary

This charming children's picture book introduces the young reader to King Midas, who we are told is rich, kind, and somewhat foolish. The King and his daughter, Zoe live in a palace surrounded by a lush and famous rose garden. During one of their daily walks in the garden, they come across Silenus the satyr, hungover and sleeping among the rose bushes. Zoe and King Midas help Silenus who is a friend of the god, Dionysus. Suddenly, Dionysus descends from the sky, luxuriating in a fluffy, shimmering bed of clouds, holding a golden gimlet and wearing a crown of sumptuous, bright purple grapes.

As a reward for helping Silenus, Dionysus grants King Midas one wish. Without hesitating, the King wishes that everything he touches be turned into gold. Dionysus challenges his request, but Midas insists upon it. His wish is granted, and at first he delights in transforming tables, his rose garden, and fountain into gold. When King Midas eats his dinner, however, he despairs when he turns his meal - a large leg of chicken, and wine – into solid gold. Saddest of all, he also transforms his daughter, Zoe into gold, who freezes mid-gesture into a rock-hard statue.

Midas begs Dionysus to undo the wish. The God directs him to submerge himself in the nearby river (presumably the River Pactolus). Clutching Zoe, the King plunges them both into the water, and they emerge restored. The story concludes with a more contemporary image of people enjoying the gleaming stream, suggesting that King Midas is what gave the river its distinct golden hue. A small child walks in the foreground of the image alongside the stream, reading the very book we are also reading: *King Midas's Golden Touch*.

Analysis

This version of the King Midas myth draws on Nathaniel Hawthorne's version from *A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys* (1852) where the King's daughter, Zoe turns to gold when he touches her. This is what spurs Midas to want to undo the wish that Dionysus granted him, where everything he touches turns into gold. In Ovid's version, it is the King's more selfish despair at not being able to eat an elaborate meal placed that makes him want to undo the wish. While this aspect is in part retained in Jarman and Venturini's *King Midas's Golden Touch* where the King's chicken and wine are pictured as turning into

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solid gold, it is his daughter's unfortunate transformation that ultimately propels his desperate plea to undo the wish. Retaining this aspect of Hawthorne's rewriting casts Midas as a more likable, compassionate character, and makes Jarman and Venturini's version potentially more appropriate for the child reader. It also communicates the morale that familial relationships are more important than material objects and greed.

Venturini's painterly, colorful illustrations employ classical iconography that ground the book in its historical specificity. For example, the palace pictured at the beginning of the book has some Doric elements such as columns and sloped stairs. Midas wears a classical Greek-style tunic with an elaborate necklace and crown. In the middle of the fountain is a statue of a dancing Greek servant pouring water from a ceramic pot. The tableware for King Midas's banquet is elaborately decorated pottery. All of these elements contribute to the book's enlivening of the classical myth of King Midas. The concluding page creates a playful contrast between this and modern life, where people are playing by the river wearing jeans, t-shirts and activewear, kicking around a soccer ball. This sense of the book's mythological history contrasted with the present invites a dynamic grasp of time for the young reader, and a talking point for caregivers with children about how mythological elements may appear in our everyday lives.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Dionysus / Dionysos Golden Touch Metamorphosis Midas Satyr(s) Silens
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Family
Further Reading	Hawthorne, Nathaniel, "The Golden Touch", *A Wonder-Book for Girls*

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and Boys, Windermere Edition, Chicago and New York: Rand McNally and Company, 1913, 63–88.

Skene Catling, Patrick, *The Chocolate Touch*, New York: Morrow Junior Books, 1952.

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