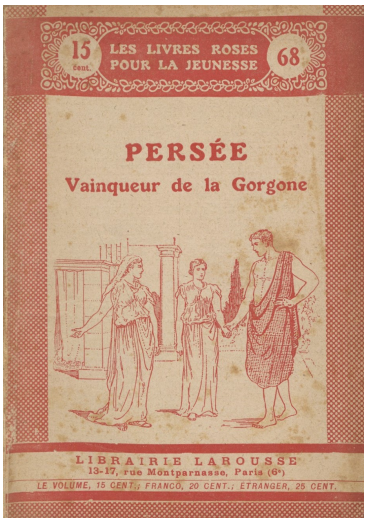
Marta Pszczolińska, "Entry on: Perseus, the Slayer of the Gorgon [Persée, le vainqueur de la Gorgone] by Jeanne Bloch", peer-reviewed by Elżbieta Olechowska and Katarzyna Marciniak. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2022). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1406. Entry version as of October 30, 2026.

Jeanne Bloch

Perseus, the Slayer of the Gorgon [Persée, le vainqueur de la Gorgone]

French (1911)

TAGS: Acrisius / Akrisios Andromeda Athena Atlas Cyclops / Cyclopes Danae Dictys Gorgon(s) Graeae / Graiai Hermes Hesperides Medusa Nymphs Perseus Polydectes



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General information	
Title of the work	Perseus, the Slayer of the Gorgon [Persée, le vainqueur de la Gorgone]
Country of the First Edition	France
Country/countries of popularity	France
Original Language	French
First Edition Date	1911
First Edition Details	*Persée, le vainqueur de la Gorgone*, adapt. pour les enfants par Mlle Jeanne Bloch, "Les livres roses pour la jeunesse" 68. Paris: Larousse, 1911, 61 pp.
ISBN	not applicable
Available Onllne	Persée, le vainqueur de la Gorgone at gallica.bnf.fr (accessed: February 24, 2022).
Genre	Adaptation of classical texts*, Adaptations, Myths, Short stories
Target Audience	Children
Author of the Entry	Marta Pszczolińska, University of Warsaw, m.pszczolinska@al.uw.edu.pl

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Creators



Jeanne Bloch (Author)

Jeanne Bloch (unknown, 18..–19..) was an *agrégée de l'université**, professor at the famous Collège Sévigné in Paris, the first French non-denominational (private) high school for girls opened in 1880 by the group of founders of the *Société pour la propagation de l'instruction parmi les femmes*. Since 1919, a kindergarten was added to the school which remains still an active and highly praised private establishment. A number of well-known French scholars and intellectuals taught at the Collège, among them the outstanding Hellenist, Jacqueline de Romilly (1913–2010), member of the Académie Française and Collège de France. Jeanne Bloch was the author of many French adaptations for *Les livres roses pour la jeneusse* - collection for children published by Larousse, such as: *Un été au pays des écureuils: histoire de monsieur Moustache et de son chemin de fer aérien* (1910), *La conversion de Catherine* (1911), *Contes de la Chine et de l'Inde* (1911), *Nouvelles aventures du Vieux Frère Lapin* (1911), *Le roman d'un lutin; suivi de La tortue bavarde: conte de l'Inde* (1911), *Les travaux d'Hercule* (1911), *Persée, le vainqueur de la Gorgone* (1911), *La Tempête et Comme il vous plaira* (1911), *Récits et légendes de la Rome antique* (1912), *Histoire de Gallus, Poulette et Glouglou* (1912).

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* According to the French education system. More here (accessed: September 9, 2020).

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Additional information

Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs

In the series, *Persée, le vainqueur de la Gorgone* is preceded by No. 67, *Le Petit Parapluie*, and followed by No. 69, *Jeannot Lapin*, both unrelated to classical Antiquity.

Summary

Persée, le vainqueur de la Gorgone is a French adaptation of vol. 30 of *Books for the Bairns* (Collection Stead) entitled *Perseus, the Gorgon Slayer*. In the Librairie Larousse's collection called *Les livres roses pour le jeunesse* [Pink Books for Youth] it is no. 68. It contains the story of the long and adventurous life of Perseus divided into 20 parts.

It starts with the argument between the twin princes of Argos: Acrisius and Proetus, their jealousy of each other evolving into fierce combat with the participation of Cyclops on Proetus' side. A wise man then predicts great misfortunes for Acrisius: as he stands up against his kin, then his own blood is to rise against him and as he sins against his family, he is to be chastened by the family. His daughter Danae is predicted to bear a son who, by the will of the gods, would be Acrisius' undoing. As a consequence, Danae is locked up in a cavern and nobody is allowed to approach her. What can thwart mortals, cannot, however, constitute an obstacle for Zeus himself. He transforms into golden rain to visit the beautiful Danae and she gives him a son named Perseus. Cruel Acrisius is afraid of the prophecy and has no mercy on his own daughter and grandson – she is locked with the newborn in a big chest and cast into the sea in order to cheat fate.

The baby Perseus does not perish as the chest is found at the coast of Seriphos island by a fisherman Dictys, brother of King Polydectes. Danae stays with the fisherman as his foster daughter for 15 years and Dictys, being a good man, brings up her child to be brave, loyal and courteous. The king is not as virtuous and polite as his brother but rather greedy, treacherous and cruel. He craves the beauty of Danae, either as his married wife or as his slave taken by force, so when she refuses to marry him, she is taken from Dictys' house and becomes the king's slave. Perseus first wants to kill the king in revenge but lets it go as Danae and Dictys ask him to refrain. As time goes by, he promises to the vicious ruler that he will bring him the head of Medusa, shown to him by the goddess Athena in a dream. The goddess, who wished the lethal head to adorn her shield, gives to the

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boy some advice on how the task can be accomplished. Hermes, who arrives with Athena, gives him winged sandals and the sword with which he slew Argus. The young hero equipped with divine objects follows the advice from the gods precisely.

His quest begins with visiting the old Graeae sisters, who share one eye and one tooth, to find out where the Gorgons stay. As they advised, he asks the same question to the nymphs, daughters of the Evening Star, and then to Atlas, their cousin. The nymphs give him a magic cap of darkness not to be seen while approaching Medusa and he goes to face the Gorgons. Eventually, he uses his shield as a mirror and Hermes' sword to cut off the Gorgon's head. Then, looking away, he wraps the trophy in goatskin and soars into the air pursued by the other Gorgons. Remembering his promise given to Atlas, he turns him into stone and then, flies further thanking the nymphs who endowed him with a magic fruit to satisfy his hunger during the seven days of his long journey through the desert.

Flying along the shore he sees a young girl, Andromeda, chained to a rock. Offered as a sacrifice to the gods of the sea, she does not want him to be killed while attempting to release her. She tells her story of innocence and punishment for her mother's sin which brought danger to the whole land. Perseus decides to help her and marry her. When the sea monster appears to devour the girl, Perseus uses Medusa's head to turn the beast into stone. Freed, Andromeda returns home where they celebrate their royal wedding. Then Perseus gives the magical objects back to Athena and builds a big galley to sail to Seriphos. There, he greets his mother and foster father after seven years of absence and visits Polydectes to fulfill the promise he made. The evil king gets what he desired and what he deserved as he turns into stone at the sight of Medusa's face.

Perseus has the last unfinished business in Argos, from where Acrisius escaped as a result of a new war with Proetus. Perseus is proclaimed king and wants to find his exiled grandfather to restore him to the throne and rule jointly with him. In Larissa, where Acrisius lived, games are taking place in which Perseus participates in order to obtain his grandfather's approval. Unfortunately, he is the cause of Acrisius' death, when during the games, he accidentally hits his grandfather with a disc. The prophecy is fulfilled and Perseus rules Argos in peace until the end of his days with Andromeda and their seven children by his side.

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Analysis

Persée, le vainqueur de la Gorgone book belongs to the collection *Les livres roses pour le jeunesse* – a series of booklets for children, which offers fables, myths, legends, fairytales and various stories, also based on literature (e.g., Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and *As You Like It* or Scott's *Ivanhoe*). The collection of booklets was published in English by William Thomas Stead (1849–1912), an English journalist and philanthropist who died in the Titanic's shipwreck. In the French version, only the names of the adaptateurs are provided, the illustrators usually do not appear, although the series contains a characteristic, unified graphic design. The booklet *Perseus, the Slayer of the Gorgon* features 50 detailed engraved illustrations, which are a great asset for children since they not only show the characters in action but can also be coloured.

The French publisher's intention, who also sold the Stead Collection, was to give French children the possibility of simultaneous reading in both languages to exercise and improve their English.

Beyond the main text about Perseus, there is also a section of *récréations* with homework tasks (quizzes, charades etc.) and solutions to the tasks given in the previous booklet of the series.

The adaptation of the myth shows Perseus' entire life, from his infancy to natural death, including information about his origin and events before his birth. The main action takes place when the protagonist is a child or teenager. Thanks to this approach a child reader can sympathize or even identify with the hero. The character is depicted as an innocent victim of intrigues and cruelty of the ruthless rulers, Acrisius and Polydectes, but despite that, he remains polite, courteous and full of compassion. He loves his family, but can also show mercy to Polydectes by refraining from killing him and forgiving his grandfather, mostly thanks to Dictys who raised him to be a good boy. As a young person, Perseus is also hasty, he makes promises without due consideration. When talking to Athena, he reveals his attitude to life: it is better to die seeking glory in the prime of life than to live without thinking, like animals, and die in obscurity and scorn. As Athena appreciates his heroic values of strong spirit, bravery, and loyalty, she rewards him by giving him even more heroic power to accomplish the quest in her service. Another important trait of Perseus, an unusual one, is patience and obedience, necessary for this impossible mission. When calling Athena, he cries in tears: "I have

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promised spontaneously, but I will execute with patience" (p. 18) – he realizes that courage, intelligence and consistency should be used together to achieve the goal.

Even despite the fact that the myth uses the motif of magical objects (without which the hero would not be able to cope with the task which exceeds human measure) and supernatural help, it is these epic qualities of courage, cleverness and obedience to Athena that ensure his victory. Besides that, Perseus is a teenager who shows the emotions of an ordinary person: after accepting the challenge he does not know how to cope with it and pleads in tears for the goddess' help.

The main theme of the booklet are the adventures of Perseus and his becoming a hero, but there are many fewer sub-plots clarifying or delaying the main plot. The text also provides some interspersed descriptions and informative explanations important for a child not yet familiar with Greek mythology.

Among other explanations, there is Athena's monologue in which she displays her traits and powers to the boy (and to children reading the story) telling him about her foe Medusa who used to be beautiful like Aurora, but then made an error and because of that became hideous, dreadful and evil with the power of the deadly look, a mortal sister of immortal Gorgons, mother of a winged horse, a giant with a golden sword (without mentioning their names, Pegasus and Chrysaor), Geryon and Vipera. Another element of narrative delay is the description of the sea deities, nereids and tritons, playing on the waves around their queen Galatea. Amongst other explanations one can find geographical issues: Greek cities, islands, deserts, lands around the Red Sea, Palestine or Ethiopia devastated by the rage of Poseidon. As an addition to the story of Andromeda, there is also a description of the further fate of the inhabitants of her country: as they abandon the cult of Zeus established by Perseus, they are punished by the arrival of a foreign people from Egypt, who fight and destroy them (according to the author it is an account of the struggles of the Hebrews against the inhabitants of Chanaan).

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Acrisius / Akrisios Andromeda Athena Atlas Cyclops / Cyclopes Danae Dictys Gorgon(s) Graeae / Graiai Hermes Hesperides Medusa Nymphs Perseus Polydectes

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Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Child, children Death Family Heroism Punishment Siblings

Further Reading	De Blacam, Aodh, "Books for the Bairns", *The Irish Monthly* 74.876 (1946): 265–273. Accessed September 8, 2020. Wood-Lamont, Sally, *W.T. Stead's "Books for the Bairns"*, Salvia Books, Edinburgh, 1987.

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