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Enid Blyton , Anne Johnstone , Janet Johnstone

Tales of Long Ago

United Kingdom (1965)

TAGS: Aetiology Aphrodite Apollo Arachne Athena Cupid Daedalus Daphne Demeter Echo Eros Hades Hera Hermes Hyacinth Icarus Juno Laurel Wreath Mercury Metamorphosis Midas Narcissus Orpheus Pandora Pandora's Box Persephone Phaethon Pluto / Plouton Proserpina Psyche Pygmalion





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General information	
Title of the work	Tales of Long Ago
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1965
First Edition Details	Enid Blyton, *Tales of Long Ago*. London: Dean and Son Ltd., 1965, 184 pp.
ISBN	9780603032615
Genre	Illustrated works, Instructional and educational works, Myths
Target Audience	Children
Author of the Entry	Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk
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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).

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Anne Johnstone (Illustrator)



Janet Johnstone (Illustrator)

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Additional information

Summary

This is a collection of short stories "retold by Enid Blyton" for children. Half are drawn from Greek mythology, half from Arabian Nights.

Tales from Ancient Greece:

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

Tales from the Arabian Nights:

- *Where these stories came from*
- *The Rich Man and the Genie*
- *The Story of the Old Man and the Deer*
- *The Story of the Old Man and the Two Black Dogs*
- *The Fisherman and the King of the Black Isles*
- *The History of the Young King of the Black Isles*
- *The Story of Sinbad the Sailor*
- *The Strange Little Island*
- *The Giant Roc and the Valley of Diamonds*
- *The Black Giant and the Great Serpent*
- *Cannibal Island and the Friendly King*
- *The Old Man of the Sea*
- *The Hill of Elephants*
- *Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp*
- *The Enchanted Horse*
- *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*

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Analysis

In *Tales from Ancient Greece*, characters are referred to by the Latinized forms of their names (e.g. "Proserpina" rather than "Persephone", "Cupid" rather than "Eros"). The narrator is unidentified. The myths are told in a way that emphasises the moral lessons that children can learn from them.

Pandora and the Whispering Box, for example, places more emphasis than the ancient traditions upon Pandora's excessive curiosity; the sorrows are not sent with her to earth as the traditional versions have it, but Mercury, passing by, requests to leave the box with Pandora and Epimetheus as it is a hot day to be travelling with it. This scenario, Pandora's defiance of Mercury's warning to stay away from the box, and her repeated rejection of her companions' urging to leave it alone all re-enforce the impression that Pandora's behaviour is obstinate disobedience. The box is represented, in text and illustration, like a gift box, following the 16th century Lilius Giraldus of Ferrara tradition. Like several of the stories, a further moral is explicit in the conclusion of the story: *And thus, because of Pandora's foolish curiosity, sorrow, pain, and evil entered the world, and have been with us ever since. But hope stayed too, and while we have her we are content.*

Phaeton and the Sun-Horses emphasises the negative effects of excessive boasting, wilfulness ("wilful boy", "proud boy"), and failure to listen to the advice of superiors. This is a typical interpretation of this myth, and it is re-enforced at the end of the story with reference to Phaeton's parents mourning "their foolish little son" (in this version, Apollo rather than Helios is the boy's father). The traditional addition of Cygnus metamorphosing into a swan as he pined for Phaeton concludes the story.

Proserpina and the King of the Underworld: Beautiful young Proserpina is the daughter of Ceres, who works hard to make farmers' corn grow. When Ceres goes to work, Proserpina plays in a meadow, looked after by nymphs, gathering flowers. Pluto, riding past in his chariot, hears Proserpina singing and laughing and stops to "peep through the bushes" at her. He lives in the Underworld, a "horrid kingdom" with no flowers, bird-song, or sunlight. He "fell in love with [Proserpina], and longed to take her down to his dark kingdom to brighten it." As he knew that Ceres would not allow him to marry Proserpina, he captures her and carries her off. Proserpina begs him

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to let her go to return to the mother who loves her, but he answers that he loves her too and will therefore take her away to be a Queen. Proserpina is unhappy; she struggles and cries for help. She flings her girdle to a water-nymph, "bidding her take it to Ceres". Ceres "forgot her duties and neglected to help the farmers" as she searched for Proserpina. She found Proserpina's girdle and heard from the nymph what had happened. She mourned in a cave "forgetting all her duties to men and women", unwilling to let anything grow while Proserpina was gone. The people prayed to Jupiter for relief. Ceres prayed to Jupiter for Proserpina's return. Jupiter grated that Proserpina might return if she had eaten nothing. Mercury delivered this message to Pluto and Proserpina. Proserpina wept and revealed that she had, that day, "accepted from Pluto" a pomegranate and eaten six seeds. Mercury returned from the Underworld alone. Jupiter ordered him to return and tell Proserpina that she would be free to return to the surface for six months in the year, but must abide in the Underworld the other six. Men and women rejoiced when Proserpina returned and the world was fruitful again. When it is time to go she tells her mother that Pluto is "not unkind." Ceres mourned again when Proserpina was gone. Now, each year, there is 'the beauty and warmth of summer' when Proserpina is on earth, and *the cold and bitterness of winter when she has departed*. This story contains explicit aetiology for the seasons.

The Maiden and the Laurel Tree: Apollo teased Cupid for playing with warlike bow and arrows. Cupid responded by shooting Apollo with a golden arrow, and Daphne, maiden daughter of river god, with a lead-tipped arrow. The arrows made Apollo fall in love with Daphne, and Daphne reject Apollo. Apollo asked Daphne to marry him, but she wished to marry no-one, "least of all Apollo" and ran away. Apollo chased Daphne; she was "deaf to his cries." Seeing that Apollo was about to catch her, Daphne called on her father to save her by changing her form so that Apollo would not recognise her. "A strange thing happened" and she changed into a laurel tree. Apollo catches the tree, kisses it, and tells "Daphne" that she should not have run from him, and that as she cannot now be his bride she will be his tree; he and men who are crowned as conquerors will wear evergreen laurel. The narrator notes that, as Apollo promised, laurels are evergreen and their leaves used for conquerors' crowns.

The Watchman: Zeus returns Io to her original form without her undergoing the usual wanderings harassed by gad-flies. Juno mourns Argus and adds his eyes to the peacocks' tail.

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Echo and Narcissus: The story opens with Echo's punishment for excessive chatter. Echo wishes that Narcissus might love in vain. He sees his own reflection and thinks it is a lovely nymph (not a boy, as is more traditional in this story). Dead Narcissus is changed into a little flower by sad gods. Echo pines away and dies, so that there is nothing but her voice: *You may hear her still, among the hills, repeating your words*.

The King with the Golden Touch: The River Pactolus contains gold "to this day", while Midas was *cured of his greed for gold and learnt that riches do not bring a man happiness or peace*.

Orpheus and Eurydice: Contains the unusual and somewhat harsh detail that Orpheus looked back to see if Eurydice had become less beautiful due to her time in the Underworld. The story ends with them both dead but united and wandering the Elysian Fields.

The Statue that Came to Life: The illustration accompanying this story has a miniature statue. Venus answers Pygmalion's "strange prayer."

Hyacinthus: Hyacinthus was "greatly loved by the god Apollo" – they are "two friends" rather than lovers. The story includes the tradition in which Zephyrus blows Apollo's discus fatefully off course out of jealousy. Apollo transforms Hyacinthus into a flower; Zephyrus murmurs sorrowful whispers to the flowers, which can still be heard today.

Icarus: This story of Daedalus the maze-maker is told without reference to the Minotaur. It provides aetiology for the Icarian Sea.

Arion: Arion intercedes at the end so that the offending sailors are banished rather than executed.

Tales from the Arabian Nights: Where these Stories came from: This section, addressed "Dear Children", explains that Sultan Schahriah killed all his wives, but held off killing one in order to hear her stories, night by night. The introduction explains that these are some of those stories, and that in this format they may read the stories straight through, while they might imagine how the "Sultaness" broke off "at the most exciting point in order to continue them the next night, and so save her life."

The Story of Sinbad the Sailor: At this point there is a shift from

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anonymous narrator to first person: "I am Sinbad...". The first of his stories ends with him buying many slaves, but subsequent ones emphasise him using his new wealth to help the poor and live in peace. At the end of Cannibal Island, Sinbad also gives money to "the church." The anonymous narrator returns for *Aladdin*.

The collection is written with quite simple vocabulary in order to be comprehensible by those learning to read. The Greek myths section contains a significant degree of moralising; this is less pronounced in the Arabian Nights section. Often these aspects of moral guidance sit very naturally with the material: Phaeton is too proud, Echo is too noisy, Midas is too greedy, and they all learn their lessons one way or another. This reflects the strong tradition of associating Graeco-Roman myths with moral education for children; in this way, the book collection combines moral lessons, cultural and literacy education, and entertainment through the stories. Other aspects of ideology are quite clearly a product of their time and place and sit awkwardly with both the ancient material from which the stories are drawn, and modern liberal values. For example, while the main elements of *Proserpina and the King of the Underworld* reflect the fundamentals of the Hesiodic tradition, there is a distinctive endorsement of rape culture, such as the normalising of Pluto's desire to possess Proserpina against her will, combined with the representation of Ceres' distraught response as a dereliction of duty. *The Maiden and the Laurel Tree* similarly chooses to be more sympathetic to Apollo than to Daphne, referring rather to his "love" for her and "grief" at her transformation and providing him with several lines of admonishment to the Daphne laurel tree, while Daphne's perspective is given little treatment at all.

Homosexual elements of the ancient myths are rendered heterosexual in this collection. In *Hyacinthus*, Apollo and Zephyrus are competing for Hyacinthus' friendship, in contrast to the more romantic love-triangle found in material from antiquity (e.g. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 10.170–219). Narcissus mistakes his own reflection for a female nymph and falls for "her", rather than falling in love with his reflection as a male youth.

Racist colour associations and descriptions appear throughout. For example, there is an implicitly racist colour scheme in Pandora, in which the "brown-winged" evils (described that way four times) are contrasted with white "snowy-winged" Hope. In Phaeton, Africans are "burnt black with the awful heat, and never did their skin return to its

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	rightful colour" (my italics). A black slave's colour in *The Fisherman and the King of the Black Isles* is the only apparent explanation for him being described as "monstrous." In *The Enchanted Horse*, the "fair" Princess of Bengal is "snow-white", with the implication that her whiteness is a fundamental aspect of her beauty.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aetiology Aphrodite Apollo Arachne Athena Cupid Daedalus Daphne Demeter Echo Eros Hades Hera Hermes Hyacinth Icarus Juno Laurel Wreath Mercury Metamorphosis Midas Narcissus Orpheus Pandora Pandora's Box Persephone Phaethon Pluto / Plouton Proserpina Psyche Pygmalion
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Abandonment Child, children Disobedience Knowledge Morality Parents (and children)
Further Reading	Foley, Helene P., *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993. Harrison, Jane E., " Pandora's Box", *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 20 (1900): 99–114. Kummerling-Meibauer, Bettina, "Orpheus and Eurydice: Reception of a Classical Myth in International Children's Literature" in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Childhood… The Classics and Literature for Children and Young Adult*, Leiden: Brill, 2016. Murnaghan, Sheila, and Roberts, Deborah H., "Arachne's Web: the Reception of an Ovidian Myth in Works for Children" in Owen Hodkinson and Helen Lovatt, eds., *Classical Reception and Children's Literature: Greece, Rome and Childhood Transformation*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2018, 141–161. Nelson, Max, "Narcissus: Myth and Magic", *The Classical Journal* 95.4 (2000): 363–389. Ray, Sheila, "Blyton, Enid Mary (1897–1968)" in *Oxford Dictionary of*

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