Rosemary Wells

Max and Ruby's Midas: Another Greek Myth

United States (1995)

TAGS: Midas





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General information	
Title of the work	Max and Ruby's Midas: Another Greek Myth
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States, Australia
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1995
First Edition Details	Rosemary Wells, *Max and Ruby's Midas: Another Greek Myth*. New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 1995, 24 pp.
ISBN	9780142500668
Awards	1997 – Shortlisted for Red Clover Award.
Genre	Picture books
Target Audience	Children (Young children (recommended age range 4–8 years))
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Creators



Rosemary Wells , b. 1943
(Author, Illustrator)

Rosemary Wells is an American children's author and illustrator. Her mother was a ballet dancer and her father an actor and playwright, and Wells grew up in a cultured, loving household. She was determined to be an artist from a very young age and practiced her drawing skills diligently. After finishing high school she enrolled in the Museum School in Boston, but was unhappy there and left without completing her degree. She married at the age of nineteen, and began working as a book designer first in Boston and then in New York. After collaborating on other projects, she wrote and illustrated her first picture book, *Unfortunately Harriet*, in 1972, and published the well-known *Noisy Nora* the following year.

She is best known for her numerous Max and Ruby books. Like most of Wells' work, they feature anthropomorphic animal characters. Ruby is the precocious, bossy big sister, and Max the curious, irresponsible younger brother. The books explore the complexities of sibling dynamics, and regularly conclude with Max getting the better of Ruby. The series has been adapted as a children's cartoon, with a sixth season premiering in late 2016.

In addition to *Max and Ruby's first Greek Myth: Pandora's Box*, Wells has also published *Max and Ruby's Midas: Another Greek Myth* (1995). She has also written creative and historical fiction for young adults.

Sources:

Official website (accessed: June 28, 2018).

Profile at the Penguin Random House website (accessed: June 28, 2018).

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Additional information

Translation	French: *Max le gourmand,* Paris: L'École des loisirs, 1995.

Summary

This picture book retells the myth of Midas and the golden touch. Like Wells' treatment of the story of Pandora, this myth is presented as a moral parable embedded within a frame narrative featuring the rabbit siblings Max and Ruby. The story opens in their kitchen, with Max crooning 'Hello, Beautiful!' to a pink cupcake. Ruby catches him concealing cupcakes underneath his pyjamas. Putting him back to bed, she announces that she will read him 'a bedtime story about someone whose sweet tooth got out of control.' Prince Midas hates fruit and vegetables, and develops laser-beam eyes that can change healthy food into delicious sweets. Unfortunately, his gaze also targets his mother, father, and sister, who are transformed into desserts, complete with unhappy faces. Missing his family and full of regret, Max searches the house, finally discovering them gathered in the kitchen for dinner, returned to their original form, and offering him hot fudge sundae for dessert. Having learnt his lesson, Midas zaps the sundae into broccoli. It is less clear whether Max has grasped Ruby's lesson. When she finishes reading the story he appears to have fallen asleep, but as she leaves his room he can be seen, silhouetted against the moonlit window, about to devour a stolen cupcake. 'Good night, Beautiful', he says, and it is left open whether he is bidding farewell to the cake or his sister.

Analysis

In this rendering of the myth, the golden touch is replaced by the ability to transform healthy food into sweets, so that gluttony becomes the focus of the story. (A similar approach was taken by Patrick Skene Catling in *The Chocolate Touch* (1952)). For a child audience, the desire for food, and particularly sweets, is potentially more relatable than the more abstract concept of gold. As Ruby reads aloud to Max, the text self-consciously references the transmission of the mythic tradition through storytelling. The text showcases the use of myth to teach a moral lesson, though as in all her *Max and Ruby* stories, Wells is ambivalent about whether Max has actually learned anything.

Wells seems to revel in the task of visually depicting the ancient

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	setting, hiding witty and anachronistic details within the illustrations. The endpapers feature a row of Minoan bulls above leporine statues resembling the Discobolos and Athena Parthenos. The story of Midas is distinguished from the frame narrative using pale green paper and borders featuring repeated patterns of the Greek key design and olive branches. Midas' palace has Ionic columns, friezes with more Minoan bulls, and black figure pottery vessels. The hot fudge sundae is served in a huge blue krater encircled with a design of white rabbits. Max's laser-beam eyes glow red as he turns his mother into a cherry float and his sister Athena into a slice of birthday cake, but go green when he tries to zap the sundae into a bowl of broccoli. The power of his gaze contains an echo of Medusa's petrifying stare, but this lighthearted story resists delving too deeply into the world of classical mythology.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Midas
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Animals Desires Disobedience Emotions Gaining understanding Morality Siblings Storytelling Transformation
Further Reading	Review, January 5, 1995, online at publishersweekly.com (accessed: September 19, 2018).

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