Miriam Riverlea, "Entry on: Wreckers by Julie Hearn ", peer-reviewed by Elizabeth Hale and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/571. Entry version as of October 30, 2026.

Julie Hearn

Wreckers

United Kingdom (2011)

TAGS: Jupiter Pandora Pandora's Box Prometheus Zeus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Wreckers
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2011
First Edition Details	Julie Hearn, *Wreckers.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 340 pp.
ISBN	9780547225494
Genre	Dystopian fiction, Historical fiction, Horror fiction, Novels, Romance fiction
Target Audience	Young adults
Author of the Entry	Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com
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Creators



Julie Hearn , b. 1958
(Author)

Julie Hearn is a British writer of historical fiction for young adult readers. Born in Abingdon, near Oxford, she began writing stories at a young age.She attended Oxford University, where she studied under the fantasy writer Phillip Pullman. After graduating she became a journalist, working as a features editor and freelance writer. She worked in Australia and lived in Spain before returning to the UK to pursue further study and creative writing. Her first novel, *The Minister's Daughter*, was published in 2006. An idea from her Masters thesis became the basis of the time-travel novel *Follow Me Down* (2009), and *Rowan the Strange* (2011) was shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal. She has a daughter, Tilly, and still lives in Oxfordshire.

Sources:

Profile at simonandschuster.com (accessed: October 12, 2018)

Profile at global.oup.com (accessed: October 12, 2018)

Profile at teenreads.com (accessed: October 12, 2018)

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Additional information

Summary

This dystopian young adult novel weaves the myth of Pandora's Box into a complex narrative that is both historical and futuristic. The title of *Wreckers* refers to the eighteenth-century fishermen who would retrieve goods from ships foundering on the treacherous rocky coastline of Cornwall, and may have played a part in luring those ships onto the rocks. The text's Prologue, set in 1732, describes a group of Wreckers bringing ashore a load of cargo, including an ancient wooden chest. This mysterious object is conveyed to the manor of the local lord, where the town's elite are gathered to celebrate his daughter's 21st birthday. The guests amuse themselves by guessing what could be inside. The lord uses a crowbar to break open the box, which '*feels as it's been…shut fast…for a thousand…years*' (6). The contents of the box are not explicitly revealed, but the sight fills those present with abject terror. A servant is commanded to hurl the box into the sea, but he is disgruntled and instead places it in a secret room, hidden behind a mural decorated with classical motifs, where it remains undiscovered for centuries.

The narrative then shifts from this historical setting to a dystopian future – sixteen years after terrorists have razed London, killing millions. In response the government has closed British borders and instituted extreme measures including capital punishment, public whippings and enforced abortion for unmarried women. At the same time, action has been taken to address environmental disaster. Eco-Christianity has become a state religion, and cars and mobile phones are no longer used by ordinary citizens. The isolated seaside town of Port Zannon has embraced a simpler existence, and there is a feeling of cautious optimism as fish stocks begin to increase.

Teenagers Dilly, Danzel, Jenna, Gurnet, and Maude are descendants of the original Wreckers. They were all born at the time of 'The Attack.' On Halloween night, the gang camp out in the abandoned manor house and discover the creature that had remained hidden in the forgotten box. Black, slimy, with wings and porcine features, it is Hopelessness, the last of the evils that remained in the box. Gurnet, a hulking, simple boy who suffers from violent fits of rage, takes the creature into his care, naming it Laurence, a name he likes. Fed on salt water and Gurnet's stories of the sea, Laurence begins to thrive, speak, and grow. Under his influence, many of the citizens of Port Zannon become depressed, and the friends begin to grow apart.

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Meanwhile, the town is overrun by a Hollywood film crew, who have come to make a period piece movie about the original Wreckers. They take up residence in Dilly's mum's Mermaid themed café. Jenna becomes obsessed with the charismatic film_star Connor Blue, but he falls in love with Maude. When Laurence spits in the face of the local priest, Gurnet and Laurence go into hiding, where the creature plots the destruction of the ocean's plankton, the source of all life on earth. Dilly and Danzel reunite to support their friend, and in the midst of a terrible storm that destroys the American's ship, Laurence is struck by lightning and obliterated.

In the aftermath of these dramatic events, the gang of friends discover a tiny, winged creature, like a shining dragonfly. Though not stated explicitly, the implication is that it is Hope. Gurnet, still grieving for his friend Laurence, wants to keep it, but in the end he lets the creature fly away.

Analysis

Wreckers has been classified as an example of the genre mythpunk.Coined by the author Catherynne M. Valente, the term describes texts in which 'classical folklore and fairy tales get hyperpoetic postmodern makeovers' (https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/Mythpunk Accessed 23 August 2018). Hearn recontextualises the myth within the framework of speculative fiction, linking the figure of Hope with humankind's optimism about saving the planet from environmental collapse. She rewrites the myth by imagining the afterlife of Pandora's box, and by placing something into its empty cavity: Hope's antithesis, the creature Laurence. Pandora is cast as the original wrecker – the girl who wrecked the world by opening the box. Maude, who discovers the secret compartment in the wall of the abandoned manor – identifies as her successor, and the depression that she experiences is connected to her feelings of guilt and responsibility.

The narrative is multivocal, comprising the first person narrations of the teenage friends (with the exception of the reticent Maude) as well as several other characters. Their accounts are interspersed with the commentary of an omniscient, unknown narrator ("You've been wondering for a while, haven't you, who, or what, I am?" (p. 277)), who reflects on the renown of the ancient myth, as well as its revisioning:

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"The young people of Port Zannon have probably never even heard of Pandora's Box. And if they have, you can bet they know of only one ending to the tale: that after hope was released, to flutter in the face of cruelty, greed, and all the other nasties in the world, that was it. The box was empty.

Wrong." (p. 47)

The allusions to Classical myth – notably filtered through the Roman tradition rather than the Greek, via the use of the Latin names of the gods and the design the frescoed wall – form merely one element of this complex and provocative work. The theme of re-enactment recurs throughout the story, not only in terms of the rediscovery of the box, but also via the reconstruction of the story of the Wreckers by the Hollywood film crew. Jenna, susceptible to romantic fantasies, also engages in a re-enactment when she borrows the fine clothes of the lady of the manor. Ranging into the past and the future, confronting issues of local and global significance, and featuring moments of romance and horror, *Wreckers* is a complicated text that invites rereading.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Jupiter Pandora Pandora's Box Prometheus Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adolescence Christianity Environment Family Friendship Future History Peers Small town life Society Supernatural creatures (non-classical) Teenagers Utopia and dystopia

Further Reading

Buckley-Archer, Linda, 'Wreckers by Julie Hearn – Review', *The Guardian* 2 April 2011 (accessed 22 August 2018).

Meek, Margaret, '*Wreckers*: The Time Has Come…' *The School Librarian* 59. 2 (2011): 117–118.

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