Miriam Riverlea, "Entry on: The Hero Schliemann: The Dreamer Who Dug for Troy by Robert Byrd, Laura Amy Schlitz", peer-reviewed by Elizabeth Hale and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/721. Entry version as of November 01, 2026.

Robert Byrd , Laura Amy Schlitz

The Hero Schliemann: The Dreamer Who Dug for Troy

United States of America (2006)

TAGS: Archaeology Bronze Age Homer Iliad Mycenae Odyssey Troy





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

General information	
Title of the work	The Hero Schliemann: The Dreamer Who Dug for Troy
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States of America
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2006
First Edition Details	Laura Amy Schlitz, *The Hero Schliemann*, ill. Robert Byrd. Cambridge: Candlewick Press, 2006, 72 pp.
ISBN	9780763622831
Awards	*Bulletin of the Centre for Children's Books* Blue Ribbon Winner; A Junior Library Guild Selection.
Genre	Biographies
Target Audience	Children (Juvenile readers: recommended age range 9 – 12 years)
Author of the Entry	Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaoundé 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com

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



Robert Byrd , b. 1942
(Author, Illustrator)

Robert Byrd is an American artist, illustrator and writer of children's books. He was born in Atlantic City, New Jersey, and studied at Trenton Junior College and the Philadelphia College of Art, where he now also teaches illustration. He lives in Haddonfield, New Jersey, and with his wife, Ginger, has two grown children. Byrd has illustrated numerous children's books, often focusing on figures from history (including books on Leonardo da Vinci, Benjamin Franklin, Saint Francis, and Heinrich Schliemann), or retelling myths and folktales (*Brave Chicken Little*, *Finn MacCoul and his Fearless Wife: A Giant of a Tale from Ireland*, *Jason and the Argonauts*, *Theseus and the Minotaur*).

Sources:

Profile at en.wikipedia.org (accessed: February 18, 2019)

Profile at goodreads.com (accessed: February 18, 2019)

Profile at biography.jrank.org (accessed: February 18, 2019)

Bio prepared by Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

Questionnaire

1. **What drew you to writing/working with Classical Antiquity, what drew you to particular myths, and what challenges did you face in selecting, representing, or adapting particular myths or stories?**

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The myths can be seen as just really good stories, and some of them great adventures. The challenge is staying true to the original story, which can't be altered as they were considered to be of religious significance to the ancient Greeks. Dealing with all of the violence was always an issue for young readers.

2. Why do you think classical / ancient myths, history, and literature continue to resonate with young audiences?

I think part of he interest lies in the way the myths parallel our culture's fascination with super heroes and monsters, and their quests. This seems to be about power and dominance. They are everywhere there is imagery. I see it with art students. Look at our entertainment.

3. Do you have a background in classical education (Latin or Greek at school or classes at the University?) What sources are you using? Scholarly work? Wikipedia? Are there any books that made an impact on you in this respect?

My only background in mythology is what books I read as a child. I use every source I can; picture books, the internet, books, photography for pictorial reference. All of the versions of the myths for young readers were useful. I read as many "classical myth" collections as possible. Robert Graves collection of the Greek myths were very important, and his novel, *Hercules My Shipmate* was the finest written source (for Jason and the Argonauts). Graves himself points out the various discrepancies in the early tellings by the Greeks and Romans of the same myth.

4. How did you devise your particular artistic style/idiom/aesthetic for your works inspired by Classical Antiquity?

I did try to incorporate the Greek style into my work. The Greek vases were the most important source. I used the ancient Greek artists works for reference, and tried to merge their way of seeing things with how I draw. It is interesting to see how stylized the vases are,

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compared with the realism of some of their sculpture

5. Did you think about how Classical Antiquity would translate for young readers?

I hope a good story will connect with any generation. I hope my art enhances these stories.

6. How concerned were you with "accuracy" or "fidelit"’ to the original? (another way of saying that might be — that I think writers are often more "faithful" to originals in adapting its spirit rather than being tied down at the level of detail — is this something you thought about?)

As I mentioned, accuracy to the original story line was essential, but I had a lot of freedom in the drawing, composition, color, etc. We still don't know exactly what everything looked like.The ancient myths of course must be simplified for young readers, but I do try not to talk down to my audience. Children get it.

7. Are you planning any further forays into classical material?

At some point, another myth could be fun. Today publishing markets are always changing, and they dictate direction for children's books.

8. Anything else you think we should know?

My next book is *Liberty Arrives*, Dial, Penguin Random House 2019, the complete story of the Statue of Liberty.

Prepared by Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

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Laura Amy Schlitz , b. 1955
(Author)

Laura Amy Schlitz is a children's storyteller and librarian. Born in Maryland, she attended Groucher College in Towson, graduating in 1977. In addition to working as a playwright, actress and costumer, she is the author of several children's books, including *Good Masters! Sweet Ladies! Voices from a Medieval Village* (2007), also illustrated by Robert Byrd, which received the Newberry Medal in 2008. She lives in Baltimore, and works as the librarian at The Park School in Brooklandville, Maryland.

Sources:

Profile at bloomsbury.com (accessed: March 25, 2019)

Profile at candlewick.com (accessed: March 25, 2019)

Profile at inkwellmanagement.com (accessed: March 25, 2019)

Bio prepared by Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com

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Additional information

Summary

Schlitz' book gives an account of the life of Heinrich Schliemann, the infamous figure who discovered – and also destroyed – the ancient city of Troy. It reveals how Schliemann made his fortune, and how he remade the story of his life. Schlitz challenges the veracity of Schliemann's own biography, and explores the psychology of a man who loved stories so much that "he wanted them to be true" (p. 2).

One of nine children, and the eldest surviving son, Schliemann's upbringing was humble. His father was an unpopular Pastor in the German village of Ankershagen, and his mother died when he was nine. As a teenager, he was withdrawn from school to help support his family. Later in life he would paint a more romantic picture of his childhood. He was enthralled by local legends of hidden treasures, and his father's Christmas gift of a copy of the *Iliad* filled him with a determination to prove the truth of Homer's stories.

The text details how misfortune transformed Schliemann's life. Contracting tuberculosis saved him from a mundane existence as a grocer's assistant, and a miraculous escape from a shipwreck off the Dutch coast led him to become a successful merchant and businessman. His incredible proficiency for learning languages enabled him to travel the world for work and pleasure, and the text includes a world map detailing the extensive list of destinations Schliemann visited as he began his foray into the fledgling discipline of archaeology. Schlitz introduces the other players in the story of Troy's discovery – Frank Calvert, Wilhelm Dörpfeld, and Sophie Schliemann. But the focus remains on the charismatic, contradictory figure of Schliemann himself, who, in spite of his incredible discoveries, was ridiculed by the media, derided by other archaeologists, and is remembered more for his lies than for proving Homer to be true.

Robert Byrd's playful line drawings depict key moments from Schliemann's life, as well as renderings of some of the artefacts he uncovered. The opening full-page illustration highlights the role of fantasy in Schliemann's life. It depicts him as a small boy imagining the wooden horse and the towers of Troy as a he reads the *Iliad*, his cat curled up on the couch beside him. Byrd's illustrations also appear in special sections illuminating the Homeric Question (p. 27), the scientific discoveries of the nineteenth century (pp. 20–21), the history

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of Troy (pp. 28–29), dating systems (p. 33), and the principles of stratification (pp. 44–45). The text concludes with an annotated bibliography and extensive endnotes.

Analysis

In recent years biographies written for children have flourished, offering an alternative kind of storytelling that aims to inspire and educate as well as entertain. *The Hero Schliemann* engages the reader via accessible language and vivid storytelling, supported by Byrd's appealing, lighthearted illustrations. On the back cover copy, Schlitz describes her discovery of the figure of Schliemann: "When I began researching Schliemann's life, I thought, *What a story!* And it was all true. Then I read more and discovered that some of it wasn't true. My romantic hero was a mythmaker and a liar." The text celebrates the power of a story to enchant, and Schlitz reveals an awareness that she herself is playing a part in the mythmaking process. In the popular imagination, Heinrich and Sophia Schliemann have taken on the same mythic proportions as Helen, Hector, and Homer himself.

Furthermore, Schlitz alludes to the mystique of the archaeologist as treasure hunter, linking Schliemann with other pioneers of the discipline, such as Arthur Evans. Yet while glorying in his incredible discoveries at Troy, the reader is encouraged to reflect on the devastating impact of Schliemann's impetuous and destructive excavation techniques, as well as the way that he amended the story of his discoveries to add to their drama and mystique. "All archaeologists, past and present, work together. Each object is a clue to the past, and archaeologists count on one another to pass on only the right clues. In hedging about exactly where and when the objects were found, Heinrich cheated his colleagues of the opportunity to learn the real history of his treasure." (p. 51).

The story of Sophia wrapping up Priam's treasure in her shawl and carrying it back to their living quarters, where Schliemann decorated and photographed her in the golden diadem, is so evocative that it is still recounted today. Schlitz writes "this is a good story. It is still found in books, but it is not true." (p. 48). Sophia was not present at the excavation on that day, and it is now believed that Schliemann combined several collections of treasure to make the discovery appear as dramatic as possible.

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	Schliemann is not alone in longing for Homer's myths to be real. Others – both laypeople and scholars – continue to express the same desire. The tales are simply that good; as Schlitz says, they "set the imagination on fire." (p. 4). Attempts to map the voyages of Odysseus and Jason on to the Aegean (or elsewhere in the world), or debates over what the Trojan horse might really have been (a siege engine? an earthquake?) are part of the same impulse.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Archaeology Bronze Age Homer Iliad Mycenae Odyssey Troy
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Character traits History Identity Past Propaganda Storytelling Success and failure Travel Truth and lies
Further Reading	Online review at kirkusreviews.com (accessed: March 25, 2019).

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