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***Just Add Water: Myth, Meaning and Metamorphosis in Australian Children's Media***

In the popular Australian television show *H2O—Just Add Water* (Network 10, 2006-2010), three teenage girls become part-time mermaids, after swimming in a mysterious pool. Thereafter, if they get wet, they metamorphose instantly from girl to mermaid, meaning they can't do the dishes, or go to the popular kids' pool parties. The idea of metamorphosis maps neatly onto media ideas about adolescence. Teens, of course, are metamorphosing physically, socially, and emotionally. The girls' awkward and comic transformations occur in ways that highlight the many dilemmas of being a teenager.

Of particular interest is the use of mythical figures to highlight these dilemmas. Mermaids occur in many cultures, and the girls of *H2O* encounter different variants of the mermaid legend throughout the series. Indeed Australian children's media draws on a range of mythical figures to exploit the drama of adolescence and childhood. For instance, *Genie from Down Under* (ACTF/ABC/BBC, 1996-1997) sees a pair of Ocker genies lurk in mysterious opal pendant found by a recently arrived British tween. In more dramatic vein, the recent *Cleverman* (ABC 2016-2017) blends figures from the Dreamtime in a consideration of racism, asylum seekers, and border protection.

Myths are powerful because they lend themselves to a range of applications; their flexibility and resonances add meaning to children's media. This paper will examine the power and range of ancient myth in Australian children's media, and to consider its application to the experience of contemporary childhood.



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