Robin Diver, "Entry on: Myths and Legends of Greece and Rome by William Byron Forbush , Frederick Richardson ", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1043. Entry version as of November 08, 2026.

William Byron Forbush , Frederick Richardson

Myths and Legends of Greece and Rome

United States of America (1928)

TAGS: Apollo Arachne Ariadne Baucis Bellerophon Ceres Cupid Jason Jupiter Medusa Mercury Minerva Pandora Philemon Pluto / Plouton Prometheus Proserpina Psyche Theseus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Myths and Legends of Greece and Rome
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	English speaking countries
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1928
First Edition Details	William Byron Forbush, *Myths and Legends of Greece and Rome*. Chicago: A. Flanagan Publisher, 1928. All references here are to William Byron Forbush, *Myths and Legends of Greece and Rome: A Book by William Byron Forbush*, Read Books Ltd., 2011, no location.
ISBN	1444659499
Genre	Fiction, Mythological fiction
Target Audience	Children
Author of the Entry	Robin Diver, University of Birmingham, robin.diver@hotmail.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

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



William Byron Forbush , 1868 - 1927
(Author)

William Byron Forbush (b. February 1868, Springfield, Vermont) was a Quaker pastor, author, teacher and composer of hymns. Forbush graduated from Dartmouth College in 1888, then served as principal of a New Hampshire school. In 1892, he became a pastor of the Riverside Congregational Church, Rhode Island, and would go on to become pastor in different locations along the East Coast. He gained official religious qualifications at the Union Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1889. In his home of Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, he led the *Woolman House,* a school dedicated to religious and social education. He also founded the *Knights of King Arthur* in 1893, an educational and care organisation for boys. In 1895, Forbush achieved a Doctor of Laws degree from Hanover College, Indiana. He died on 23 October 1927, which makes *Myths and Legends* a posthumous publication if we accept the 1928 publication year given by the reference work *Children's Books on Ancient Greek and Roman Mythology* (Brazouski and Klatt) and multiple internet resources and archives.

Forbush is the author of *The boy problem; a study in social pedagogy* (1902), *The life of Jesus* (1912) and *The sex-education of children* (1919).

Sources:

Biographical note at the start of 2011 edition of the book: *Myths and Legends of Greece and Rome: A Book by William Byron Forbush,* Read Books Ltd., 2011, no location. No author given for note.

Brazouski, A. and M. J. Klatt, *Children's Books on Ancient Greek and Roman Mythology: An Annotated Bibliography,* Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994 (Bibliographies and Indexes in World Literature, v. 40).

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Bio prepared by Robin Diver, University of Birmingham, RSD253@student.bham.ac.uk



Frederick Richardson , 1862 - 1937
(Illustrator)

The Frederick Richardson credited with illustrating this book appears to be the American teacher, newspaper illustrator and book illustrator (b. 1862, Chicago). Richardson studied at St. Louis School of Fine Arts and Académie Julian (Paris). He went on to teach at the Chicago Art Institute for seven years, illustrate the newspaper*Chicago Daily News* and finally in 1903, move to New York and become an illustrator of books.

Richardson illustrated a large number of works of myth and folklore, including some of Andrew Lang's Fairy Books, Francis Jenkins Olcott's 1917 *The Red Indian Fairy Book,* versions of *Mother Goose* and *Aesop's Fables,* Georgene Faulkner's *Little Peachling and Other Tales of Old Japan* (1928) and *The White Elephant and Other Tales from Old India* (1929),and the work of Hans Christian Anderson. He produced pictures for the World's Columbian Exposition for *Chicago Daily News* in 1893. He also illustrated John Heming Fry's anti-modernist *The Revolt Against Beauty* (1934)with artwork which parodied Van Gogh and Gauguin.

Richardson was a member of the Art Nouveau movement. He had two sons, Allan and David.

Sources:

wikipedia.org (accessed: June 9, 2020);

Lost Art Books: picturethispress.com (accessed: June 9, 2020);

Top Illustrations: topillustrations.wordpress.com (accessed: June 9, 2020);

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Past and Present: pastandpresent.com(accessed: June 9, 2020).

Bio prepared by Robin Diver, University of Birmingham, RSD253@student.bham.ac.uk

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Additional information

Summary

This is a collection of a large number of Greek myths, retold for children. The book divides into sections:

- ‘Stories from the Beginning’,
- ‘Stories of Gods and Men’,
- ‘Stories of Air and Ocean’,
- ‘Animal Stories’,
- ‘Stories of Life and Love’ and
- ‘Hero Tales’.

These categories thus implicitly position what myth is seen to be about: nature, aetiology, relationship with the divine, brave heroes, romance and the meaning of life. At the end of each chapter, Forbush includes a list of ‘literary references’, showing ancient and contemporary literary sources the child might read to find out more, and quotes lines of poetry that are relevant to the story. The end of the book includes a pronunciation dictionary.

- To Boys and Girls.
- To Parents and Teachers.
- Pandora: How Hope Came into the World.
- Prometheus: The Brave Fire Giver.
- Cadmus: I. The Search for the Lost Sister II. The Sowing of the Dragon’s Teeth.
- Venus and Adonis: How the Spring Flowers Come.
- Minerva and Arachne: The Two Wondrous Weavers.
- Mercury the Mischievous.
- Apollo and Daphne: The Laurel of Victory.
- Apollo, Idas, and Marpessa: The Choice Between the Two Lovers.
- Apollo and Hyacinthus: The Story of the Hyacinth.
- Diana and Endymion.
- Vesta and the Vestal Virgins.
- Vulcan, the Blacksmith of the Gods.
- Cupid and Psyche: I. How Cupid Found Psyche II. How Psyche Found Cupid.
- Proserpine and Pluto: A Story of Winter and Spring.
- Pan and His Pipes.
- Phaeton: How he Drove the Horses of the Sun.
- Daedalus and Icarus: A Story of the First Flight and the First

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Airship.
- Aristaeus and Proteus: Shepherds of the Land and Sea.
- Ceyx and Halcyone: A Story of the Sea Birds.
- Arion: How he Rode the Dolphin.
- The Pygmies and the Cranes: A Story of the Little People.
- The Battle of the Frogs and the Mice.
- Latona and the Country People: How There Came to be any Frogs.
- The Cranes of Ibycus: The Singer and the Birds.
- Bellerophon and Pegasus: The Story of the Winged Horse.
- Atalanta, the Swiftest Runner.
- Rhoecus, the Boy Who Forgot.
- Baucis and Philemon: The Kind Old People.
- Orion, the Unlucky Hunter.
- Midas of the Golden Touch.
- Admetus and Alcestis: The Great Fight with Death.
- Antigone, the Faithful Sister.
- Hercules, the Strongest Man.
- Perseus, the Dragon Slayer.
- Theseus and Ariadne: The Journeys of an Adventurer.
- Castor and Pollux: The Heavenly Twins.
- Orpheus and Eurydice: The Great Singer's Quest.
- The Argonauts: I. How the Centaur Trained the Heroes. II. How Jason Lost his Sandal. III. How They Built the Ship Argo. IV. How the Argonauts Won the Golden Fleece. V. How the Argonauts Reached Home.
- The Trojan War: I. The Decision of Paris. II. Hector and Achilles. III. The Wooden Horse.
- Ulysses: The Long Journey of a Brave Hero: I. Adventures with the Cyclops. II. Circe. III. The Sirens. IV: Calypso. V. How Ulysses Met with Nausicaa. VI. Ulysses Comes Home.
- Pronouncing Dictionary.

Analysis

The note at the start, "To Parents and Teachers', identifies the target audience as 'children who are in about the fifth grade in school'; presumably therefore around ten years old. The purpose of the anthology is 'to retell these ancient legends frankly as enjoyable stories, with some incidental attention to their moral value and some suppression of uncomfortable details." (p. xi).

Like most myth anthologies, Forbush draws heavily on Ovid's

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Metamorphoses, making the addition of 'Rome' to 'Greece' in the title perhaps more honest than other anthologies that obscure the Roman nature of some of their stories (see Roberts 2015 "The Metamorphosis of Ovid in Retellings of Myth for Children", in Maurice, L.. ed., *The Reception of Ancient Greece and Rome in Children's Literature: Heroes and Eagles.* Leiden and Boston: Brill, 233–258).

In general, this anthology has a charming and pleasant tone, but in places this tone is inconsistent or rather dissonant. The Pandora retelling is an example of this. Here, Epimetheus is arguably more foolish than Pandora. Pandora wonders what is in the golden casket she has brought with her, and when she confesses to the Titans she does not know what it is, Epimetheus advises her to open it whilst Prometheus advises her not to. Pandora at first listens to Prometheus. Eventually, however, she opens it alone, and when Prometheus and Epimetheus appear they both blame her and want to kill her in punishment. Epimetheus decides not to because he told her to open the casket in the first place, "and when he remembered how happy Pandora had made him, he had not the heart to hurt her" (p. 5). This is rather out of place with the charming tone of the rest of the story.

Forbush's retelling of Prometheus, meanwhile, seems to have drawn inspiration from Christian belief and possibly Nordic Ragnarök. In addition to Prometheus prophesying a future enemy for Zeus, a passage presumably derived from *Prometheus Bound,* he also prophesies "the happy day when good should triumph and cruelty should be destroyed forever". (p. 10.) Forbush finishes, "As some tell the story, Prometheus finally revealed his secret to Jupiter, and when the great last day of battle came, Prometheus again helped Jupiter to win the final victory." (p. 11).

At the end of each chapter, Forbush includes a list of 'Literary References', which includes ancient source material, Romantic poetry and other children's books of myth. Nathaniel Hawthorne, author of the influential children's anthologies of myth *A Wonder Book for Girls and Boys* (1851) and *Tanglewood Tales* (1853), is frequently cited in the literary references section (e.g. the Pandora retelling). This is not surprising, since Hawthorne's versions function as (usually unacknowledged) blueprints for later children's anthologies – for fuller discussion see Murnaghan and Roberts (2018) *Childhood and the Classics: Britain and America, 1850–1965*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Riverlea (2017) 'My First Book of Greek Myths: Retelling Ancient Myths to Modern Children' (doctoral thesis,

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accessed: June 16, 2020). Some editions of Forbush's text appear to have borrowed parts of Hawthorne's title, since there are online listings for *The Wonder Book of Myths and Legends* (1928) by William Byron Forbush (e.g. biblio.co.uk, accessed: June 9, 2020).

Some of Forbush's retellings are more obviously derived from Hawthorne than others; for example, the Europa tale is a straight retelling of the Hawthorne version from *Tanglewood Tales*. It begins with the same Romantic tone and includes many of the same specific details: the bull's breath smells of flowers, the bull bows before little Europa as if he recognises her as royalty, the brothers drape Europa in flower garlands and then leave to chase a butterfly, and Europa jokingly calls out goodbye to her brothers right before the bull runs away with her. In both, we never find out that the bull was Jupiter and Europa's fate remains mysterious after her abduction. Each of the brothers of Europa give the same reasons as in Hawthorne for abandoning the search, and as in Hawthorne the family of Europa lose their royal appearance as their long search for her makes them look like peasants. In both Hawthorne and Forbush, Cadmus initially mistakes Harmonia for Europa when she appears. The portrayal of the family, however, has taken a darker turn compared to Hawthorne's version, with Cadmus' father now speaking cruelly to him after the loss of Europa: "his eyes flashed fire and he looked so terribly angry that the poor boys did not even wait for supper, but stole out of the palace" (p. 17). The stories of Baucis and Philemon and Midas also draw heavily on Hawthorne.

The section on Vestal Virgins in particular shows the influence of social mores of the time on reception. The Vestals are consistently described as 'gentle'. Forbush claims that to be selected as a Vestal, "Each candidate must be perfect in mind and body, fair to look upon, and sweet in spirit." (p. 67). Once new Vestals are recruited, the priestesses 'gently' teach them forms of worship (p. 68), and "All was calm and loving in the House of the Vestal Virgins" (p. 68). The description of the ancient home fire follows early twentieth century ideals of the family: "every day when fathers and mothers and children gathered around the fire they remembered to be thankful to this kindly goddess. Every meal that was prepared on the fire at home made them realize how happy they were in the common pleasures of home life." (p. 66). Here, the home and nuclear family are understood to be a cosy place of warmth, safety and retreat from the world, reflecting an insularity that is more modern American than Roman.

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Roman festivals are also described in the terms of early twentieth century America. For the Vestalia, married women are allowed in the Penetralia and "There, in this most sacred of places the mothers prayed for that which their hearts held dearest – the happiness of their homes. It was a sort of Mothers' week. They came in deep humility, with their hair let down and barefoot, to ask blessings upon those they loved." (p. 69). Women in this past society are understood to always care most about their homes and those they love. The Vestalia is presented as a "Mothers' week", but it is maternal devotion and selflessness, not the women themselves, who are central.

Forbush avoids discussion of Hell and the afterlife by calling Pluto king of the 'lower world' without elaboration. Ceres initially punishes the earth because she thinks it, not Pluto, has stolen Proserpine. Jupiter, in contrast to ancient versions of him, "wanted to help Ceres" in her quest to find her daughter (p. 95).

Royal human characters, meanwhile, are sometimes made into commoners. For example, the family of Metaneira, who Ceres stays with, are peasants, and the simplicity of their fare is implicitly praised. Presumably, this is a Christian message about humbleness and non-materialism. Likewise, Bellerophon appears to start out as a commoner who "worked for a crafty master who claimed to be fond of him. After a time his master grew very jealous of Bellerophon and decided to try to have him done away with." (p. 155). At this point, however, the myth begins to fall in line more with the Ovid version, since the master's father-in-law who he sends Bellerophon to with an order to kill him turns out to be the king of Lycia. As in ancient myth, Bellerophon marries this king's daughter, so he does eventually become royalty.

Theseus temporarily believes himself to be in love with Ariadne, but then remembers an old love, Aegle, and decides to abandon her. Such behaviour in Forbush's version makes him rather similar to his father, since whilst Theseus and Aethra idealise Aegeus, he is generally callous and unloving to them. This extends to the ending, since Aegeus' suicide over believing Theseus dead is not included in this version.

The Medusa story draws on a lesser known version by Apollodorus, in which Medusa is punished for boasting she is more beautiful than Athena, as opposed to the Ovid version where she is punished for being raped in Athena's temple by Poseidon. Another anthology

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retelling for children that uses this version is James Reeves' *Heroes and Monsters* (1969).

Forbush was evidently a man of strong religious convictions with an interest in the moral education of children, particularly boys. This is shown in his professional involvements and his other publications (see author biography). Teaching morality and appropriate family values of the time may have been a particular concern to him, in addition to the general educational nature of this work. We can perhaps see a clash in parts of this work between his goals of moral education and his goals of historical/literary/cultural education through presenting a close retelling of ancient myth and an environment accurate to the perceived historical setting of these stories. This might go someway to explaining the rather uneven tone of this anthology, by turns Romantic in the style of Hawthorne, celebratory of values of simplicity, goodness and selflessness and somewhat harsh, cruel and suspicious of the family relationships it elsewhere praises.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Apollo Arachne Ariadne Baucis Bellerophon Ceres Cupid Jason Jupiter Medusa Mercury Minerva Pandora Philemon Pluto / Plouton Prometheus Proserpina Psyche Theseus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Animals Environment Heroism Learning Nature

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