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Margery Jean Gill , Roger Lancelyn Green

The Luck of Troy

United Kingdom (1961)

TAGS: Achilles Agamemnon Antenor Cassandra Deiphobus Electra Hector Hecuba Helen Hermione Iphigenia / Iphigeneia Menelaus Mycenae Nicostratus Odysseus / Ulysses Palamedes Palladium Paris (Trojan Prince) Polyxena Priam Sparta Theano Trojan Horse Trojan War Troy



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General information	
Title of the work	The Luck of Troy
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1961
First Edition Details	Roger Lancelyn Green, *The Luck of Troy*. Illustrated by Margery Gill, London: Bodley Head, 1961, 168 pp.
ISBN	9780140367638
Genre	Action and adventure fiction, Juvenile fiction*, Mythological fiction
Target Audience	Children
Author of the Entry	Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com
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Creators



Margery Jean Gill , 1925 - 2008
(Illustrator)

British illustrator of children's books, particularly editions of children's classics published in the 1960s and 70s, Margery Jean Gill was born in Coatbridge, North Lanarkshire, Scotland, but grew up in Hatch End in London. She loved to draw from an early age, and aged 14 left grammar school to attend the Harrow School of Art. She continued her study of etching and engraving at the Royal College of Art. She illustrated her first children's book, an Oxford University Press edition of Robert Louis Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses*, the same year she married actor Paddy Jordan. Further commissions for OUP preceded long associations with Puffin and Bodley Head, for which she illustrated more than thirty books between the late 1950s and the early 1980s. She began working in colour in the early 1960s. Her depiction of child characters was recognised for conveying the complexity of their emotions – not all positive - as well as their physicality. Her style fell out of fashion in the 1980s, and she published her last work, Ann Thwaite's *Pennies for the Dog*, in 1985.

Sources:

Illustrator whose bold style reflected modern attitudes to children, theguardian.com (accessed: September 15, 2020).

Matthew Weaver, *Margery Gill: A life in pictures*, theguardian.com, published December 11, 2008 (accessed: September 15, 2020).

Terry Potter, *Margery Gill*, letterpressproject.co.uk, published August 24, 2017 (accessed : September 15, 2020).

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

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Roger Lancelyn Green , 1918 - 1987
(Author)

Roger Lancelyn Green was born in Norwich, England, into a privileged and historic English family. He studied for a B. Litt. at Oxford University. CS Lewis was one of his tutors and Green became a member of the Inklings literary group along with Lewis and JRR Tolkien. Green remained close friends with Lewis throughout his life, including going on holidays in Greece. Green is credited with inventing the name *The Chronicles of Narnia* for Lewis' famous fantasy series.

Green became a university librarian and scholar of English literature, delivering the Andrew Lang lecture as part of a fellowship at the University of St Andrews in 1968. He published biographies of Lang, JM Barrie and CS Lewis, as well as researching the lives of Hans Christian Andersen and Lewis Carroll. In addition, between the late 1940s and the 1970s he wrote numerous retellings of myths and legends for children, including tales from the Classical, Egyptian, and Norse traditions, as well as the tales of King Arthur and Robin Hood. While most of the works are traditional retellings, *The Luck of Troy* (1961) is an original story focalised through the perspective of the boy Nicostratus, son of Helen and Menelaus, who grows up in Troy.

His son, Richard Lancelyn Green (1953-2004), also became an academic, and is regarded as a world-renowned expert on the work of Arthur Conan Doyle and the character of Sherlock Holmes.

Sources:

Profile at goodreads.com (accessed: September 15, 2020).

Profile at en.wikipedia.org (accessed: September 15, 2020).

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Additional information

Summary

The Luck of Troy transforms the Trojan War saga into an original story focalised through the character of the twelve year old boy Nicostratus, the son of Menelaus and Helen. Having been brought to Troy by his mother when he was a baby, Nico grows up in the besieged city, with only hazy memories of Greece and his father, and a deeply conflicted sense of identity and loyalty. As the war's impact intensifies, most of the Trojans reject and persecute him as a traitor, but he finds some comfort in the house of Antenor and his wife Theano, Priestess of Athena, and in a friendship with Priam's youngest daughter Polyxena, who lives with the older couple much of the time.

Green's more traditional version, *The Tale of Troy*, published three years earlier in 1958, provides the framework for this more subjective retelling, which illuminates the personalities and relationships of the main characters of the myth. The book begins with a *Prologue at Mycenae*, featuring Hermione staying with her older cousins Electra and Iphigeneia during the funeral for their grandfather, King Atreus. Helen has recently eloped with Paris and Menelaus and Odysseus have gone to Troy to demand her return. Arriving back to Agamemnon's Palace at Mycenae, the men discuss the impending conflict, making it clear that Helen's abduction is merely a pretext for an inevitable political conflict between the Barbarians and the Greeks, East and West.

The narrative then shifts to Troy in the tenth year of the war. Nico and Polyxena watch from the city walls as Hector kills Patroclus and is in turn slaughtered by Achilles. After Priam bargains with Achilles for his son's body in return for its weight in gold, the children look on as the crafty inventor Palamedes constructs a huge set of scales below the walls of Troy. When the treasury is empty and Hector's body still not balanced, Polyxena tosses down her golden jewelry, capturing Achilles' attention. Nico discovers that his childhood friend has fallen for the Greek hero, and uncovers a secret arrangement, engineered by Antenor and the crafty Palamedes, to end the war by marrying Polyxena off to Achilles. But Paris double-crosses Achilles and shoots him with a poisoned arrow, and the Greeks stone Palamedes to death for his treachery.

Nico is a witness to other intrigues. He observes Helen bathing the feet of a mysterious beggar whom she identifies as Odysseus, best

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friend of her first husband. As their resistance to Troy grows, Paris becomes increasingly hostile to both his stepson and his wife, but it is only after his death that they are in real danger. Helen is passed over to another brother, Deiphobus, who is abusive, cruel and violent. Nico realises that he "had hated Paris, but he hated Deiphobus a hundred times more, and with a new, fierce hatred that sometimes rather frightened him" (p. 131). Despite the risk, Nico and Helen assist Odysseus in stealing the Palladium, the special statue of the goddess Athena, known as the Luck of Troy for its reputed powers to protect the city in which it resides. But while Odysseus makes off with the statue through a secret passage out of the city, it remains uncertain whether he has taken the real artefact, or a convincing copy created by Theano. They know that Odysseus has a plan to bring down the city, but he has refused to share the details, asking only that Helen leaves a lamp burning in her window on the next moonless night.

Nico and Helen are confined to her tower for the final weeks of the war, with vile Deiphobus counting down to his wedding day when he will hang Nicostratus the "treacherous Greek cub" (p. 148) from Troy's walls to be picked apart by birds and dogs. Fortunately the wedding never takes place, as the Trojans awaken one morning to find that the Greeks have abandoned their camp. While Cassandra rants prophesies of doom, the massive wooden horse that they have left behind is dragged within the city walls. The Trojans feast and celebrate, and that night Helen is once again overcome with madness and persuades Deiphobus to take her to see the horse. There, she uses her unique powers for mimicry to call out to those hidden within using the voices of their wives. As the couple moves away, Nico watches as the hidden Greeks descend from the belly of the horse and move out to take the city. Drunk and dangerous, Deiphobus is about to murder Nico when Menelaus appears and slaughters his enemy. The family is reunited and Helen's crimes are forgiven. Nico eagerly awaits his departure from Troy and the journey to his Greek homeland, which he imagines to be "the loveliest land on earth" (p. 171).

Analysis

In spite of his more creative approach in this book, Green makes sure to highlight that "no character in the story is invented" (p. 10). However, in his final Author's Note, he admits that the "actual part played in the story by Nicostratus is without direct authority from the ancient authors" (p. 173). A son of Helen and Menelaus is referred to

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in Apollodorus (*Library* 3.11.1), and Green explains that his intention was to "present the last year of the Siege of Troy as it would have appeared to this Greek boy of twelve or thirteen who had such exceptional opportunities of observing all that happened" (p. 174). *The Luck of Troy* establishes a literary tradition in which young characters witness the events of myth, and at times play an active part in the action. In doing so, child readers are given the opportunity to experience the same vicarious pleasure of watching and playing with myth.

Nico's character enables Green to explore different themes to those addressed in the more traditional *Tale of Troy*. As he comes of age, Nico struggles with his identity as a Greek within Troy, and feels conflicted in his loyalties to the few Trojans whom he knows and respects, and the unknown Greek warriors, including his father, who parade on the plain below the city. In this story there are good Trojans and bad Greeks.

Caroline Cooney, author of the young adult novel *On the Seas to Troy* (2004), also has Helen bring her baby boy, this time called Pleisthenes, with her when she comes to Troy. But where Cooney's Helen is a fearsome figure who treats her enemies with shocking cruelty and exalts in the fact that men are willing to die for her, Green's Helen is a gentle, often despondent woman who grieves the burden of her beauty. Gill's illustrations depict her modestly swathed in robes, with her face frequently turned away from the viewer. Helen says to her son:

> "Oh, Nico, what is going to become of us when Troy falls? Will Menelaus forgive me – can the Greeks allow him to forgive me? Think how many have died in this war – all because of me. Whether it was my fault or not, it was all because of me! Oh, it would have been better, far better, if I had never been born!" (p. 53)

Green's Helen is victim both of the lusts of men and of the gods' manipulations. Hermione blames the magic of Aphrodite for her mother's madness: "She was drugged; she was walking in a dream; that evil Trojan pipe had taken away her wits" (p. 31). But though the narrative regularly references the powers of the gods, they do not appear as characters within the story. Instead, the story highlights links with the archaeological record, describing funeral rituals held within the beehive tombs at Mycenae, and including Palamedes' message written in Linear B.

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	Along with cowardly, indolent Paris and cruel, abusive Deiphobus, Palamedes emerges as the villain of the story. Odysseus finds it hard to forgive him for exposing his feigned madness on the beach at Ithaca, and Menelaus finds him "rather tiresome and effeminate" (p. 30). Green draws on a range of ancient sources including references in Plato, Virgil, and Ovid to flesh out his character, who speaks with an unattractive lisp. Palamedes is credited with clever inventions (including dice games to amuse the soldiers, and the scale upon which Hector's body is weighed), but in his treachery and double-dealing he is unfavourably contrasted with Odysseus, who is both ingenious and heroic.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Achilles Agamemnon Antenor Cassandra Deiphobus Electra Hector Hecuba Helen Hermione Iphigenia / Iphigeneia Menelaus Mycenae Nicostratus Odysseus / Ulysses Palamedes Palladium Paris (Trojan Prince) Polyxena Priam Sparta Theano Trojan Horse Trojan War Troy
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Boys Character traits Child, children Child's view Coming of age Conflict Death Family Freedom Friendship Gender Heroism Identity Innocence Integrity Memory Nation Parents (and children) Prediction/prophecy Princes and princesses Race Relationships Revenge Romance Step-parents Subjectivity Survival Violence War

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