Margaret Bromley, "Entry on: A Horse with Wings by Alison Forbes, Neville Smith", peer-reviewed by Elizabeth Hale and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1169. Entry version as of November 06, 2026.

Alison Forbes , Neville Smith

A Horse with Wings

Australia (1955)

TAGS: Pegasus





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

General information	
Title of the work	A Horse with Wings
Country of the First Edition	Australia
Country/countries of popularity	Australia
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1955
First Edition Details	"A Horse with Wings" in: Neville Smith, *Animal Talk and Other Stories for Boys and Girls*, ill. Alison Forbes, Melbourne: F.W. Cheshire, 1955, 95 pp.
Genre	Illustrated works, Short stories
Target Audience	Children
Author of the Entry	Margaret Bromley, University of New England, brom_ken@bigpond.net.au
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Creators



Alison Forbes , b. 1933
(Illustrator)

Alison Forbes was born in Melbourne in 1933 and attended Camberwell Grammar School. In the early 1950s she undertook an illustration and design course at Melbourne Technical College. She worked on the *Herald* newspaper from 1953 as an illustrator for five years, during which time she freelanced after hours as a book designer. In 1963 she moved to the UK for ten years to work with Oxford University Press.

Alison Forbes was the first full-time independent book designer in Australia. Her career evolved over the transformative period of Australian publishing. She designed hundreds of books, including titles that are iconic in the development of Australian culture, including the first edition of Joan Lindsay's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1967).

Neville Smith describes Alison Forbes as "a gifted young artist" on the flyleaf of *Animal Talk and Other Stories*.

Bio prepared by Margaret Bromley, mbromle5@une.edu.au, brom_ken@bigpond.net.au



Neville Smith (Author)

Neville Smith was an editor of *The Argus Weekend Magazine* edition of "The Second World War in Map and Story" 7 April 1941, which claimed to be "writing history as it was happening". *The Argus* was a morning daily newspaper published in Melbourne from 1846 to 1957. *Animal Talk and Other Stories* was published by F.W. Cheshire, a Melbourne educational bookseller.

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Additional information

Summary

“A Horse with Wings” tells of how a young boy named Charles wants a pony, but when he kicks his football through the window on the back verandah, he saves his parents the trouble of punishing him by putting himself to bed without any supper. As he drifts off to sleep, a winged horse visits him, Pegasus, who assumes the authoritative voice of an adult, advising that “People do not believe the stories about the ancient Greek gods nowadays, which is rather a shame, because many of the tales were rather beautiful. However, they were only imagination, and should not have been a religion. Your religion, Charles, is based on truth, and that is the true religion” (p. 35).

Pegasus explains that his task was to bring poetic inspiration to great poets, started in the spring Hippocrene on Mount Helicon. Amongst the “great thoughts” and “noble ideas” inspired by this source were the tenets to speak the truth, be honest and to honour and love your parents. For they are “sacrificing a lot, and you owe them a lot in return” (ibid).

Pegasus delivers further advice regarding attitudes at school: “to work hard and help others weaker than yourself”. As well, “lots of New Australian boys and girls are going to your schools nowadays. They have a difficult time in a strange country with a strange language” (ibid). Helping them would be a “noble thing”. Pegasus concludes his lesson suggesting that Charles be a team player, “guided by great and noble thoughts, you will share my task, providing an inspiration for others”.

Analysis

“A Horse with Wings” is included in an anthology of didactic stories, the common theme of which is children being punished for their accidents and misdemeanours, but whose dreams and wishes are intended to teach them a lesson. The central person of these stories is always “a normal Australian girl or boy”. As a “call to the people of Australia”, the anthology is heavily didactic and prescriptive with regards to cultural homogeneity. The values that Pegasus imparts in this story percolate through the stories, from which “long words are kept out”, but all of which have happy endings.

Each story ends similarly, directed at the reader, for example “Now

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wasn't that a strange adventure, girls and boys, how would YOU like to have been Charles" (p. 36).

The inclusion of Pegasus in this anthology of children's short stories shows the influence of Greek myth and literature on simple tales. It reinforces the role of Greek myths as emanating from a civilisation whose language and thought influence the cultural and literary construction of the child reader. The mythical Pegasus is distilled to a character whose rational teachings deliver a "common sense" lesson.

Intended as bedtime reading or classroom study, the message is that Charles's religion, by implication Christianity, is "based on truth, and that is the true religion", that the beautiful stories of the ancient Greek gods are merely a pagan fantasy. Pegasus as a character from ancient Greek mythology appears in the space vacated by adults, in the supernatural space of a child's dream. In this story he is gentle and goodhearted, eager to help.

The winged white horse, Pegasus, is capable of everything, as inspiration for this children's fantasy. Pegasus is an agent of change, enabling the realisation of children's dreams and their empowerment.

The role of the mythical winged horse is not to tell his own story, but as a vehicle of socialisation, to facilitate Charles's moral code of behaviour.

Published during the second wave of post-War migration, and during the time of White Australia Policy (1901–1966), Pegasus's reference to the reception of New Australians in the classroom community, aims to dispel prejudice towards migrants, most of whom at the time came from Europe.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Pegasus

Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant

Character traits

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