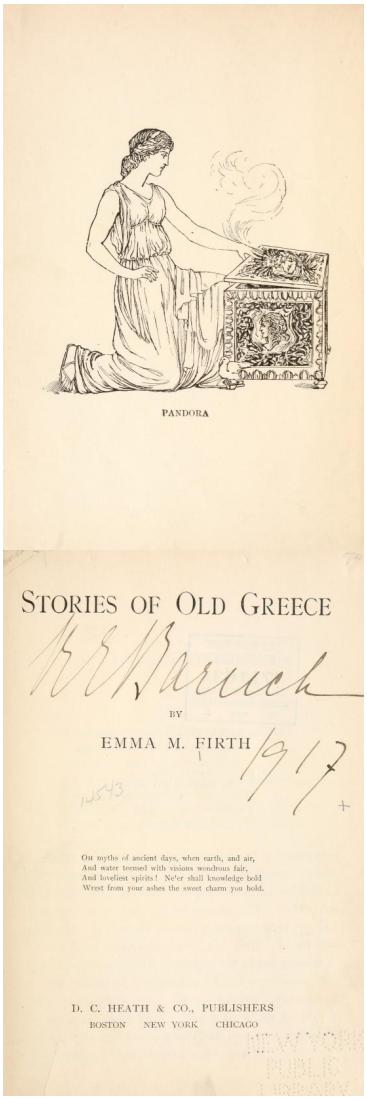
Robin Diver, "Entry on: Stories of Old Greece by Emma M. Firth", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1271. Entry version as of November 11, 2026.

Emma M. Firth

Stories of Old Greece

United States of America (1894)

TAGS: Apollo Arachne Athena Baucis Clytie Daphne Demeter Epimetheus Eurydice Hades Helios Hermes Hyacinth Medusa Orpheus Pandora Persephone Perseus Philemon Prometheus Psyche Zeus



Frontispiece and title page to *Stories of Old Greece and Rome*, retrieved from Archive.org, public domain (accessed: April 4, 2023).

General information	
Title of the work	Stories of Old Greece
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	Canada, United States of America
Original Language	English

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.

First Edition Date	1894
First Edition Details	Emma M. Firth, *Stories of Old Greece*. Boston: D.C. Heath & Co., 1894.
Available Onllne	Archive.org (accessed: April 17, 2023)
Genre	Mythological fiction, Mythologies
Target Audience	Children
Author of the Entry	Robin Diver, University of Birmingham, robin.diver@hotmail.com
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Creators



Emma M. Firth (Author)

Emma M. Firth appears to have been a teacher. She addresses the introduction of *Stories of Old Greece* to her "fellow teachers". Education reports suggest she taught at a school for the deaf in Oakland, California from 1911–1912 and had thirteen pupils (source). Every online listing gives her children's anthology *Stories of Old Greece* as her only book.

Sources:

United States Congressional Serial Set, Google Books (accessed: February 12, 2021).

Goodreads Page (accessed: December 3, 2020).

Biblio (accessed: December 3, 2020).

Amazon Page (accessed: December 3, 2020).

ThriftBooks (accessed: December 3, 2020).

Open Library (accessed: December 3, 2020).

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Additional information

Summary

This is a collection of Greek myths retold for children in simple language. In the introduction, Firth writes that this book is for "her fellow-teachers and ... the dear children of America". She begins with stories about Helios, then moves to stories about Apollo, then Hermes and finally into more general stories. The retellings are accompanied by line drawings every few pages that depict key characters. Sometimes, these are sketches based on ancient statues.

Featured Stories:

- *Greece and the Greeks* (introduction to the myths),
- *Helios and Clytie*,
- *Phaethon*,
- *Apollo, the Beautiful* (birth of Apollo),
- *Hyacinthus*,
- *Apollo and the Python*,
- *Daphne, the Dawn Maiden*,
- *Hermes and Apollo*,
- *Baucis and Philemon*,
- *Rhoecus*,
- *Arachne, the Little Spinner*,
- *Psyche*,
- *Orpheus, the Sweet Singer*,
- *The Story of the Halcyon Birds*,
- *Prometheus*,
- *Epimetheus and Pandora*,
- *Perseus.*

Analysis

Like Nathaniel Hawthorne in *A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys* (1851) and *Tanglewood Tales* (1853), Firth turns many of her main characters into children. She also turns most love plots into stories about friendship and puts a childish spin on characters' actions.

For example, Helios and Clytie are friends and he promises to take her on a trip. When Clytie's father Oceanus forbids her from going, Helios tells Clytie he will take another little girl, Leucothea, instead. Jealous, Clytie waits for him every day as he passes but he now always ignores her. Clytie is also shown to be a good Victorian girl in that we are told she always brightens the mood of her surly father Oceanus.

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Likewise, Orpheus and Eurydice, Psyche and Eros, Daphne and Apollo and Epimetheus and Pandora are all shown to be pairs of friends and act like children in at least some ways. In the case of Pandora, Firth clearly references the Biblical Eve and Victorian Christian constructions of separate gender spheres by using the word helpmeet: "A dear helpmeet for Epimetheus" who reminds him "constantly of the needs of others" (p. 74).

This anthology has a heliocentric leaning, beginning with tales about Helios and Apollo as if these are the most important myths, and generally focusing on these two gods heavily. This may reflect the Victorian tendency to see sun gods as central to all pre-Christian pantheons. Apollo is portrayed by Firth as a better version of Helios. Helios himself is rather flawed and fickle.

Firth reassures readers not to be frightened by the more violent aspects of the Greek gods. Apollo, for example, has a bow and arrow, but we are told he would never use them violently and only wants to help humanity, as when he kills Python.

The illustrations take the form of simple line drawings every few pages, labelled with the name of the character depicted. The illustrator is not credited, which may mean it was Firth herself. In the case of Hermes and Apollo, their line drawings are sketches of their statues with fig leaves covering their genitals. Eros is also depicted naked with fig leaves covering his genitals. The nudity probably reflects Victorian ideas of the classical. The illustrations also sometimes undermine the text by showing characters described as children in ways that make them appear like adults. For example, Pandora opening the box is tall with adult features and attire (p. 76).

Firth makes Perseus' killing of Medusa seem like euthanasia. Here, Medusa is turned into a Gorgon as punishment for comparing her beauty with that of Athena, similar to in Reeves' later children's retelling. Perseus feels pity for her but reasons she would be better dead than living as a Gorgon.

The retelling of Perseus' rescue of Andromeda is reflective of attitudes to race current at the time. Perseus is flying over what Firth calls "the dreary desert wastes of Libya" when he sees something white and thinks it must be "a god whom the barbarians worship" (p. 87). This white shape turns out to be the white-passing body of the beautiful Andromeda.

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Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Apollo Arachne Athena Baucis Clytie Daphne Demeter Epimetheus Eurydice Hades Helios Hermes Hyacinth Medusa Orpheus Pandora Persephone Perseus Philemon Prometheus Psyche Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Child, children Disobedience Friendship Innocence Loss Love
Addenda	Page numbers given refer to Emma M. Firth, *Stories of Old Greece*, Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Yesterday's Classics, 2009, 89 pp.

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