Marta Pszczolińska, "Entry on: Greek Tales: The Winged Horse, The Mysterious Chest [Baśnie greckie: skrzydlaty koń, tajemnicza skrzynia] by Maria Buyno-Arctowa [Jagmin, Ciocia Mania, J. Brzostek] ", peer-reviewed by Elżbieta Olechowska and Katarzyna Marciniak. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2022). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1481. Entry version as of November 01, 2026.

Maria Buyno-Arctowa [Jagmin, Ciocia Mania, J. Brzostek]

Greek Tales: The Winged Horse, The Mysterious Chest [Baśnie greckie: skrzydlaty koń, tajemnicza skrzynia]

Kingdom of Poland (Königreich Polen) (1917)

TAGS: Bellerophon Chimera / Chimaera Epimetheus Mercury Pandora Pegasus





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General information	
Title of the work	Greek Tales: The Winged Horse, The Mysterious Chest [Baśnie greckie: skrzydlaty koń, tajemnicza skrzynia]
Country of the First Edition	Kingdom of Poland (Königreich Polen)
Country/countries of popularity	Poland
Original Language	Polish
First Edition Date	1917
First Edition Details	Jagmin, *Baśnie greckie. Skrzydlaty koń, tajemnicza skrzynia*, "Zajmujące czytanki" 274. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo M. Arcta, 1917, 28 pp.
ISBN	not applicable
Genre	Myths
Target Audience	Children
Author of the Entry	Marta Pszczolińska, University of Warsaw, m.pszczolinska@al.uw.edu.pl
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com Katarzyna Marciniak, University of Warszaw, kamar@al.uw.edu.pl

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Creators



Maria Buyno-Arctowa, circa 1929, in Michał Arct, *Jak powstaje książka*, Warszawa: M. Arct, 1929, 66. Public domain. Source: Polona (accessed: August 1, 2022).

Maria Buyno-Arctowa [Jagmin, Ciocia Mania, J. Brzostek] , 1877 - 1952
(Author)

Author of more than 80 books for children and young readers, e.g. *Kocia mama i jej przygody* [Cat Lover and Her Adventures], 1905; *Słoneczko* [The Little Sun], 1920; *Dziecko morza* [Child of the Sea], 1937; especially popular in the period between WW1 and WW2. She married into a family of publishers specializing in children's literature; she worked at her husband's publishing house as director of the children's section. From 1902 to 1936, she contributed to the children's magazine "Moje pisemko" as editor-in-chief and author using various pseudonyms, e.g., Jagmin, Ciocia Mania, J. Brzostek.

Sources:

"Arctowie", in Julian Krzyżanowski and Czesław Hernas, eds., *Literatura polska. Przewodnik encyklopedyczny, vol. 1: A–M*, Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1984, 29.

"Buyno-Arctowa Maria," in Julian Krzyżanowski and Czesław Hernas, eds., *Literatura polska. Przewodnik encyklopedyczny, vol. 1: A–M*, Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1984, 124.

Szałagan, Alicja, "Buyno-Arctowa Maria," in Jadwiga Czachowska and Alicja Szałagan, eds., *Współcześni polscy pisarze i badacze literatury. Słownik biobibliograficzny, vol. 1: A–B*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1994, 361–364.

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Additional information

Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs	"Zajmujące czytanki" series issued by Michał Arct publishing house contains mostly episodes strongly connected with Polish history (at that time, Poland was not a sovereign state), Polish legends or literature adapted and shortened for children.

Summary

Skrzydlaty koń [The Winged Horse] tells the story of a young man, Bellerophon, who comes to the spring of Pirene with a richly decorated bridle in his hand. A girl tells him the story of the nymph Pirene. At the spring, Bellerophon is going to wait for Pegasus so that he can tame the mythical stallion and get the help he needs to slay Chimaera. The days of waiting are long, and except for a small boy, nobody believes that Pegasus will come. Finally, the stallion appears, and Bellerophon, after harnessing his steed, flies off. They reach the wasteland destroyed by Chimaera and are immediately spotted by the monster, who is ready to attack. After a fierce and furious fight, good triumphs over evil. They return to the Pirene spring to tell the local boy that his faith helped the hero to find his courage when he needed it most. Bellerophon lets Pegasus go, but the animal wants to stay with his new friend. Later, the boy learns to ride Pegasus and gains greater fame than Bellerophon as he becomes an excellent poet.

Tajemnicza skrzynia [The Mysterious Chest] presents the land of eternal childhood inhabited by Epimetheus, an orphan boy. His friends find a girl, Pandora, who joins the boy to play with him and share in his joys so that he does not feel so lonely. The girl discovers a secret chest – Epimetheus does not want to reveal who brought it to his home and why. Although the children are happy together, Pandora still thinks about the chest. These thoughts make her reckless, and she pressures Epimetheus to reveal the secret. Finally, he tells her that Mercury brought the chest. She is sure that what the chest contains is for her because Mercury had brought her to the same place an instant later. Epimetheus still does not let her open the chest entrusted to him. Pandora resents his refusal and, for the first time, declines to play with him. Left alone, Pandora is not able to resist and unlocks the chest. Epimetheus finds her opening it but does not stop her. Horrors emerge from it: evil/bad feelings and thoughts, worries and anxieties, pain and illnesses. The children try to chase them away,

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but they spread all over the world, causing illness, sadness, and decay. Finally, the children open the chest again together, liberating Hope which had been left inside. Since then, in difficult moments, Hope has helped people endure.

Analysis

Maria Buyno-Arctowa, author and editor of many texts aimed at children, presents two selected Greek myths to teach moral lessons, showing positive and negative examples of behaviour. Classical myths are used to facilitate the moral education of contemporary children. Maria Buyno-Arctowa consistently uses devices in her texts that help get the message through to children – the protagonists are children and have animal friends. Her writings have brought joy and hope to generations of Polish children. The protagonists learn to be conscious of the consequences of their decisions and actions and to understand their choices' potential impact on themselves and others.

Although Bellerophon is young in the myth, probably a teenager, the author adds a child into the story and shows the importance of a child's faith, purity, and hope that they share with others. As the boy is the only person who believes in Bellerophon's and Pegasus' quest, his presence encourages the young hero (p. 6). When Bellerophon is about to try and defeat Chimaera on his own, the boy's faith helps him continue waiting (p. 7). Later on, the hero admits that he returned to Pirene to thank the boy for giving him courage. Without the boy's confidence and faith, Bellerophon would not have waited for Pegasus to show up (pp. 13–14). Being a true hero does not require slaying horrible monsters. The boy is a silent hero; he contributed to defeating Chimaera without even being present during the fight. What is more, the child is foretold to become a great poet, which emphasizes that children can aspire to greatness in a variety of ways (among which the saviour of humankind is only one).

Similarly, the mythical characters of Epimetheus and Pandora and their story have been transferred into the reality of childhood. Epimetheus and Pandora are just kids without parents, spending time together in a mythical setting where nobody gets old. Unlike in Hesiod's version, Pandora appears at Epimetheus' home as his companion, not his wife. Their relationship is based on friendship and shared play and games. No adults are wise enough to tell them what to do and what not to do. Instead, Epimetheus is the voice of reason

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and warns Pandora to honour the promise he made to Mercury. They fail to heed the warning, not because Pandora is wicked or Epimetheus foolish, but because they are just children: unsure, naive, curious and unable to predict the consequences of their actions. This is the moral lesson for the reader: rules of conduct must be implemented in a society (p. 19, 23). For example, having nothing to do, no duties or chores that could make her forget about the mysterious chest, Pandora indulged her curiosity (p. 19).

The attitude towards animals is another point of interest. Bellerophon wants to ride Pegasus to better fight Chimaera. Though at first, he tames the animal by forcing the defeated stallion to shed tears because of the violence, later, Bellerophon talks and whispers to Pegasus with soft words calming the horse, who begins to understand that “after ages of loneliness, he found a master and a companion at last” (p. 9). On his way to Chimaera, Bellerophon stops on Helicon, where he revises his relationship with Pegasus. Considering that the flying horse was a free being, Bellerophon decided not to treat the animal as a captive. He takes off the horse''s bridle and says: “Be my friend or leave me forever – I don’t want to take your freedom by force” (p. 10). The animal is set free, returns and becomes a friend. The relationship between the young man and the winged horse shows the reader respect for animals is a key issue in the bond between rider and steed. Pegasus is not a pet but rather a loyal, equal partner willing to stay with Bellerophon in the moment of extreme danger when they are both heavily injured.

Only parts of the two selected myths were adapted for children. The author presents episodes referring to the protagonists’ minor imperfections, eliminating more difficult issues for young readers like the manslaughter committed by Bellerophon, the queen’s false accusation or his eventual pride and hubris causing the flying hero to become a poor man despised by the gods. This way, Buyno-Arctowa’s version of the myth is not about the life and deeds of the Greek hero but about children’s faith and trust, friendship with extraordinary animals, and the need to pursue one’s dreams. The second myth also lacks the well-known details described by Hesiod. It becomes a story about children for children with a solid didactic message: Greek myths provide ideas and an educational model adequate for the difficult times at the end of the Great War.

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Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Bellerophon Chimera / Chimaera Epimetheus Mercury Pandora Pegasus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adolescence Adventure Animals Boys Child, children Childhood Desires Freedom Friendship Heroism Hope* Morality Orphans
Further Reading	Jamróz-Stolarska, Elżbieta, *Series of fiction for children and teenagers in Poland in 1945–1989. Book market and design*, Warsaw: Polish Librarians Association SBP, 2014, 23–29. Kulus, Magdalena, "Arctowie dzieciom", *Bibliotheca Nostra. Śląski kwartalnik naukowy* 3 (2011): 71–78. Skrzypczak Andrzej, "Księgarnia i wydawnictwo Michala Arcta w Warszawie 1887–1950", in Justyna Myszkowska, ed., *Warszawscy wydawcy*, Warszawa: BPW. BGWM, 2003.

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