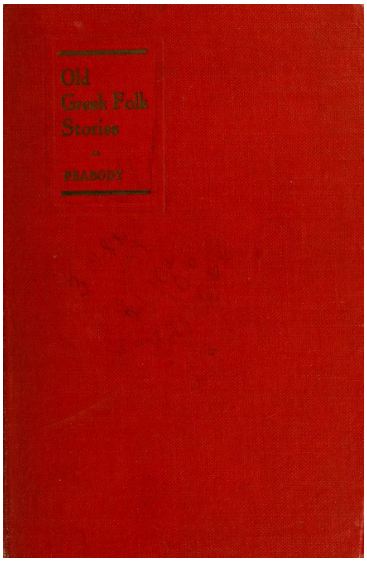
Robin Diver, "Entry on: Old Greek Folk Stories Told Anew by Josephine Preston Peabody", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2022). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1494. Entry version as of September 13, 2026.

Josephine Preston Peabody

Old Greek Folk Stories Told Anew

United States (1897)

TAGS: Achilles Admetus Agamemnon Alcestis Apollo Arachne Atalanta Athena Cupid Diana Eurydice Icarus Midas Niobe Odysseus / Ulysses Oedipus Orpheus Pan Prometheus Proserpina Psyche Pygmalion Venus Zeus



Cover retrieved from Internet Archive (accessed: August 2, 2022), public domain.

General information	
Title of the work	Old Greek Folk Stories Told Anew
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	English speaking countries
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1897
First Edition Details	Josephine Preston Peabody, *Old Greek Folk Stories Told Anew*. Toronto: The Copp Clark Co. Ltd. and Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1897, 123 pp.
ISBN	Not applicable for editio princeps
Available Onllne	*Old Greek Folk Stories Told Anew* at Internet Archive (accessed: August 2, 2022). *Old Greek Folk Stories Told Anew* at Project Gutenberg (accessed: August 2, 2022). *Old Greek Folk Stories Told Anew* digitized by Google from Harvard University copy (accessed: August 2, 2022).
Genre	Anthology of myths*, Fiction
Target Audience	Children (fans of Nathaniel Hawthorne's)
Author of the Entry	Robin Diver, University of Birmingham, robin.diver@hotmail.com

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.

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

Retrieved from Wikipedia, public domain.

Josephine Preston Peabody , 1874 - 1922
(Author)

Josephine Preston Peabody (b. 30th May, Brooklyn New York) was an American poet, playwright and author.

Peabody grew up in Brooklyn until the death of her father in 1884, where financial troubles caused her family to move to Dorchester, Massachusetts. Having learnt from her family to love literature and theatre, Peabody had her first work published aged fourteen, in *The Woman's Journal* in 1888. It was initially not clear that her education would be able to continue beyond the Girls' Latin School in Boston (1889–92), but after her poems were accepted by the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Scribner's Magazine*, the support of a patron allowed her to attend Radcliffe College in Cambridge, Massachusetts until 1896.

In 1897, Peabody published the children's anthology of Greek myth *Old Greek Folk Stories Told Anew*. In 1898, her career in poetry took off, with the publication of the verse book *The Wayfarers* (1898). In 1900, she published *Fortune and Men's Eyes*, a one-act play based on Shakespeare's sonnets, and *Marlowe* (1901), a verse play about Christopher Marlowe.

Peabody lectured at Wellesley College in Massachusetts on poetry and literature from 1901 to 1903. In 1902, she toured in Europe, and in 1906, she married Lionel S. Marks, a Harvard engineering professor. Peabody continued to publish frequently for the rest of her life. Her work includes poems for children, a play about Mary Wollstonecraft, a drama about Francis of Assisi and *The Singing Man*, a collection of poems concerning social injustice in 1911.

The Britannica entry on Peabody notes that 'Her early verse shows the influences of Shakespeare, Robert Browning, and the Pre-Raphaelites, especially Christina Rossetti; it is marked by delicacy, clarity, and a certain otherworldliness.'

Sources:

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.

Britannica (accessed: August 2, 2022).

Bio prepared by Robin Diver, University of Birmingham, robin.diver@hotmail.com

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.

Additional information

Summary

This is a collection of Greek myths for children presented as a supplement to Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Wonder Book* and *Tanglewood Tales.* The stories are based fairly closely on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. There are a small number of line drawing illustrations depicting key scenes; the illustrator is uncredited.

Featured Stories:

- The Wood-Folk (Pan, Syrinx, Dryope, Echo, Clytie),
- Judgement of Midas,
- Prometheus,
- The Deluge (Deucalion and Pyrrha),
- Orpheus and Eurydice,
- Icarus and Daedalus,
- Phaethon,
- Niobe,
- Admetus and the Shepherd (Admetus and Apollo),
- Alcestis,
- Diana and Actaeon,
- Diana and Endymion,
- The Calydonian Hunt,
- Atalanta's Race,
- Arachne,
- Pyramus and Thisbe,
- Pygmalion and Galatea,
- Oedipus,
- Cupid and Psyche,
- The Trial of Psyche,
- The Apple of Discord,
- The Rousing of the Heroes,
- The Wooden Horse,
- The House of Agamemnon,
- The Curse of Polyphemus,
- The Wandering of Odysseus,
- The Home-Coming.

Analysis

The marketing and positioning of this book, both at the time of its publication and in the present day, is keen to emphasise that this

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.

anthology 'is designed to serve as a complement' to Nathaniel Hawthorne's influential *Wonder Book* and *Tanglewood Tales*. This quote is from the publisher's note at the start of the book, which praises Hawthorne's works but laments that they tell only a few Greek myths. It adds that 'The group contained in the collection which follows will help to fill out the list'. Likewise, the blurb on the modern 2008 Yesterday's Classics edition of this text states it is 'Designed to supplement the myths retold by Nathaniel Hawthorne in *A Wonder Book* and *Tanglewood Tales*.' (see here, accessed: April 8, 2021).

In spite of the emphasis on this being a supplement to Hawthorne, it is not particularly similar to his work. Peabody's writing style is more factual: she alters ancient accounts significantly less than he does, her retellings lack Hawthorne's focus on child characters and there are no Hawthorne-like narrative framing devices. Peabody, unlike Hawthorne, does not add intentionally anachronistic elements or objects of Victorian lifestyle (e.g. Midas' spectacles in Hawthorne), or use direct address to the reader. There is no obvious reason that this particular anthology would be a companion to Hawthorne more so than the large number of other children's anthologies of Greek myth published in America in the 1890s, aside from the fact it does not retell the myths Hawthorne retold.

This anthology seems to have enjoyed positive reception for its writing style, and continues to be marketed along these lines. Charles Madison Curry and Erle Elsworth Clippinger wrote in *Children's Literature* (1920/1921) that 'The little book of *Old Greek Folk Stories*, by Josephine P. Peabody, is especially valuable … for its fine version of many of the more interesting myths' (see here, accessed: April 8, 2021). The blurb to the modern 2008 Yesterday's Classics edition states that the myths are 'retold with exceptional literary skill.' (see here, accessed: April 8, 2021).

A second note at the beginning of the anthology follows the one by the publisher, possibly from Peabody herself, although it is not credited. This note says that humans used to communicate freely with the earth, nature and animals, and Greek myths exist because of the harmony their tellers lived in with nature and the love they felt for the earth. It ends by saying these stories are too good to be forgotten. Ancient Greece is thus, in common with the late nineteenth-century fascination with the ancient world, portrayed as a Romantic childhood of humanity, in which people showed appropriate reverence for nature.

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.

In Peabody's version of the Hesiod stories, Prometheus deserts the Titans for Zeus after he sees that the Titans are violent and out of control, and fails to persuade them to be wiser. The Titans are then imprisoned by the victorious Zeus for a set time (not eternity). Zeus, as a new young ruler, wants to destroy humanity and 'replace it with some new order of creatures.' (Chapter 3.) After successfully pleading with Zeus on behalf of humanity, Prometheus takes the opportunity to teach them new things. After Prometheus is punished, the Titans' prison time comes to an end, and they try to persuade him to apologise to Zeus. The story ends with Prometheus' release. Whilst this story is broadly accurate to Hesiod and the *Prometheus Bound* text, therefore, the disturbing element of eternal torment and imprisonment is decidedly toned down for younger readers.

Zeus' adultery and polygyny is another element obscured in this text. When telling how Zeus wanted to marry Thetis, Peabody makes an aside saying that this was before Zeus married Juno.

In general, Peabody keeps close to ancient accounts whilst trying to make the actions of characters as nice as possible. For example, she claims that Athena's tapestry depicting the triumphs of the gods is a compassionate attempt to persuade Arachne there is still time to backdown from the competition. She also claims Atalanta is very saddened by having to kill suitors and is considering agreeing to marry Hippomenes without racing him out of compassion until her friends encourage her to get ready for the race, at which point she bows to social pressure.

Peabody includes a curious mix of Greek and Roman names throughout the anthology. Zeus is called Zeus, Hera Juno, Athena is called Athena, Eros is called Cupid or Love, Hermes is called Hermes, Aphrodite Venus and Persephone Proserpina. It is not clear what the rationale behind this naming inconsistency might be.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Achilles Admetus Agamemnon Alcestis Apollo Arachne Atalanta Athena Cupid Diana Eurydice Icarus Midas Niobe Odysseus / Ulysses Oedipus Orpheus Pan Prometheus Proserpina Psyche Pygmalion Venus Zeus

Environment Love Nature Other literary figures, texts and writers

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.

Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Past Transformation

Further Reading	Hawthorne, Nathaniel, *A Wonder Book for Boys and Girls*, ill. Walter Crane, Boston, MA: EriK Publications, 2015 (reprint, ed.pr. 1851). Hawthorne, Nathaniel, *Tanglewood Tales*, Chapel Hill, NC, 2009 (reprint of 1909 ed., ed. pr. 1853).

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.