Sonya Nevin, "Entry on: The Odyssey by Gillian Cross, Neil Packer", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Hanna Paulouskaya. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/153. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

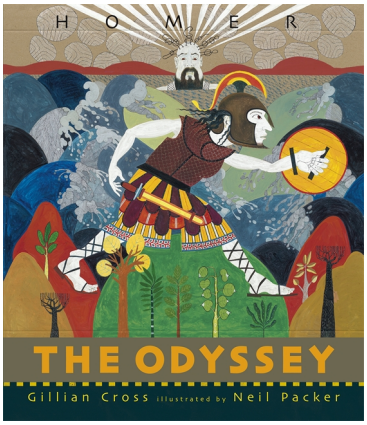
Gillian Cross , Neil Packer

The Odyssey

United Kingdom (2012)

TAGS: Achilles Afterlife Agamemnon Aphrodite Apollo Architecture Ares Artemis Asclepius Athena Charybdis Circe Cyclops / Cyclopes Gods Greek History Hades Hermes Homer Iliad Ithaca Katabasis Menelaus Odyssey Penelope Polyphemus Poseidon Scylla Sirens Telemachus Trojan Horse Trojan War Troy Underworld Zeus





Illustrations copyright **© 2013 Neil Perker** From **THE ODYSSEY by Gillian Cross & Illustrations by Neil Parker** Reproducted by permission of Walker Books Ltd., London SE11 5HJ. walker.co.uk (accessed: August 1, 2018).

General information	
Title of the work	The Odyssey
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2012
First Edition Details	Gillian Cross, Neil Packer, ill., *The Odyssey*. London: Walker Books Ltd., 2012, 175 pp.
ISBN	9781406345353
Genre	Adaptations, Instructional and educational works, Myths, Picture books
Target Audience	Young adults
Author of the Entry	Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk

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 Hanna Paulouskaya, University of Warsaw, hannapa@al.uw.edu.pl

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



Gillian Cross , b. 1945
(Author)

Gillian Cross is a British children's author from London. She studied at Somerville College Oxford, before taking a PhD from the University of Sussex. For some years, Gillian Cross worked as a government advisor promoting public libraries. Since turning to writing, she has had considerable success with the popular *Demon Headmaster* series and has won many awards. Although not usually specialising in historical fiction, Gillian Cross' publications nonetheless include *The Odyssey* (Walker Books, 2012), *Down with the Dirty Danes!* (HarperCollins, 2000), *Brother Aelred's Feet* (HarperCollins, 2007), and *The Roman Beanfeast* (Barn Owl Books, 1997).

Sources:

Official website (accessed: July 3, 2018).

Twitter profile (accessed: July 3, 2018).

Bio prepared by Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk



Neil Packer , b. 1961
(Illustrator)

Neil Packer trained at the Colchester School of Art. He worked as a graphic design before becoming a full-time freelance illustrator in the 1980s. He has done a considerable amount of work for the Folio Society. His work for tem includes illustrated volumes of Robert Graves' *I Claudius* (1994), *The Arabian Nights* (2003), Petronius'

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.

Satyrica (2003) and the fairy-tales of Hans Christian Andersen (2005). Neil Packer also illustrated Gillian Cross' *Odyssey* (Walker Books, 2012).

Source:

Official website (accessed: June 26, 2018).

Bio prepared by Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk

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

Gillian Cross' *Odyssey* is an abridged retelling of Homer's *Odyssey*, set in Greek antiquity. It is a retelling of ancient myth with an emphasis on striking visualisation.

Chapter headings:

- *The War*
- *Travelling into Disaster*
- *The Giant in the Cave*
- *Aeolus and Circe*
- *Ghosts and Monsters*
- *Stranded on Calypso's Island*
- *Nausicaa*
- *Odysseus the Beggar*
- *A Husband for Penelope*

Homer's *Odyssey* is retold, rearranged into more chronological order. The introduction explains the Trojan War briefly by way of explaining who Odysseus is and why he left home. There is a blunt account of Penelope's position – Odysseus ordering her to remarry once Telemachus has reached adulthood – this sets the reader up to have a better understanding of events later on.

During the account of Odysseus' adventures, the story occasionally switches the scene to Ithaca, updating the reader on the situation of Penelope and Telemachus. It includes Telemachus' visit from Athena and his trip to Sparta, although the trip to Pylos is avoided, perhaps for reasons of space.

During the sections abut Odysseus, frequent references to the need for food and water help to remind the reader of the perils of sea-travel and providing explanatory motivation for a number of sub-plots.

Analysis

This is a sensitive retelling of the *Odyssey*, which makes use of Homeric imagery: the sea is frequently "wine-dark", dawn is "rosy-fingered", Zeus is the "cloud-gatherer." The Sun is referred to by his Homeric epithet "Hyperion" (Homer, *Odyssey*, 12.133). Some of the speech from Homer's *Odyssey*'s is included in a paraphrased form.

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.

At some points, the narration guides the reader's interpretation quite strongly. The attack on the Cicones is referred to as a "stupid and greedy attack"; "disastrously stupid." Elements of violence and sex are included, although the more extreme aspects are sometimes omitted or toned down. Incest on Aeolus' island is not avoided but referred to matter-of-factly "our six sons and their wives – who are also our daughters." (p. 50; see Homer, *Odyssey*, 10.5). The text includes Odysseus considering suicide when the winds escape Aeolus' bag (p. 54; see Homer, *Odyssey*, 10.50). Elpenor's untimely death and a vivid description of assorted dead pressing around Odysseus in the Underworld is included, although not Odysseus' encounter with his late-mother or former comrades from Troy (p. 79; Homer, *Odyssey*, book 11). When the Suitors are challenged, the text relates that some were spared and there is a hint that others killed (literally "had to pay for their crimes"), however, the text avoids mention of the execution of the maids and the mutilation of Melanthius (p. 166; Homer, *Odyssey*, 22.461–479).

There is a lovely account of the bed-deception/recognition scene between Odysseus and Penelope. In terms of the representation of masculinity, it is interesting to note that Cross' Odysseus is 'almost in tears' at this point, in contrast to his weeping in Homer's *Odyssey* (p.169; Homer, *Odyssey*, 23.230–235).

The story ends with Odysseus explaining about the winnowing-fan prophecy, Penelope accepting, and them heading off to bed meaning to tell each other all that has happened. This forms a contrast with Homer's *Odyssey* which follows this with Odysseus visiting his father, Laertes; the dead discussing events, and a fight then peace with Ithaca's townsfolk.

While the author has done a fine job of retelling the *Odyssey*, this edition is arguably most distinctive in its illustration. The edition is heavily illustrated throughout; few double-pages go without illustration, there are many full-page illustrations, and several two-page illustrations featuring only a few words. Classical armour, clothing, and other equipment situate the events in Greek antiquity. Beyond that, the style of the illustration places the events in a surreal, fantastical environment. Figures are represented with a semi-grotesque hyper-realism, such as heads or limbs out of proportion, faces aged, distorted, and or bulbous. There is extensive use of extremes of either multi-colour, or black-and-white, or silhouette, with the suggestion of the influence of shadow-puppetry at points.

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.

Architecture is presented in an angular, stylised fashion, with people appearing within the architecture out of proportion, yet in proportion with their emotional impact within the scene.

The illustrations set the events in a fantastical ancient Greece. Ancient style clothing, arms and armaments, and architecture provide the main indicators of antiquity, although the illustrations also frequently have labels and additional text in Greek script. A Greek alphabet is provided at the end of the book. At times the illustrations are a hybrid of ancient and more modern elements; for example, an image of Odysseus and Penelope at home (echoed later at their reunion), includes aspects of ancient and modern, with ancient-style clothing and modern style architecture. Similarly, Zeus and the Sun later appear gigantic above a landscape with medieval-style buildings.

An image of the Olympian family tree helps to establish who the main divine characters are; most are depicted in ancient-style garb, while Hermes is rendered in modern sports kit of shorts and T-shirt. Poseidon is depicted in a strange fish-net style T-shirt. Elsewhere he is depicted as a humanoid-headed octopus reaching his tentacles all over a map of the Mediterranean and Aegean. Winds are also illustrated with monstrous humanoid heads. Athena is depicted in her own form and in disguise; when disguised, her true identity is suggested by the presence of an owl. The Sirens are depicted as dark-haired wingless white women. The fall of Troy is illustrated by a highly creative rendering of the Trojan Horse. A very botanical-style illustration of the lotus fruit seems to associate the story with the realm of exploration and survey work completed in the New Worlds in the 18th and 19th centuries. The combination of ancient and modern elements and the mixing of realism and fantastical elements of illustration sets the events in a deliberately unsettling imaginary environment. This is a compelling version of the *Odyssey* that makes a bold statement about the ancient epic's ability to inspire new artistic works.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Achilles Afterlife Agamemnon Aphrodite Apollo Architecture Ares Artemis Asclepius Athena Charybdis Circe Cyclops / Cyclopes Gods Greek History Hades Hermes Homer Iliad Ithaca Katabasis Menelaus Odyssey Penelope Polyphemus Poseidon Scylla Sirens Telemachus Trojan Horse Trojan War Troy Underworld Zeus

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	Character traits Death Friendship Gender expectations/construction Heroism Identity Individuality Intellect Justice Morality Parents (and children) Past Relationships Society Storytelling

Further Reading

Eisenberg, William D., "Morals, Morals Everywhere: Values in Children's Fiction", *The Elementary School Journal* 72.2 (1971): 76–80.

Miles, Geoffrey, "Chasing Odysseus in Twenty-First Century Children's Fiction", in Lisa Maurice, ed., *The Reception of Ancient Greece and Rome in Children's Literature. Heroes and Eagles*, Leiden: Brill, 2015.

Murnaghan, Sheila, "Men into Pigs: Circe's Transformations in Versions ofThe Odyssey for Children", in Lisa Maurice, ed., *The Reception of Ancient Greece and Rome in Children's Literature. Heroes and Eagles*, Leiden: Brill, 2015.

Roisman, Hanna M., "The Odyssey from Homer to NBC: The Cyclops and the Gods", in Lorna Hardwick, Christopher Stray, eds., *A Companion to Classical Receptions*, London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007.

The University of Chicago Library, 'The Children's Homer', part of *Homer in Print: The Transmission and Reception of Homer's Works* available at lib.uchicago.edu (accessed: August 1, 2018).

Copyrights

Illustrations copyright **© 2013 Neil Perker**

From **THE ODYSSEY by Gillian Cross & Illustrations by Neil Parker**

Reproducted by permission of Walker Books Ltd., London SE11 5HJ.

walker.co.uk (accessed: August 1, 2018).

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.

Sonya Nevin, "Entry on: The Odyssey by Gillian Cross, Neil Packer", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Hanna Paulouskaya. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/153. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

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.