Allison Rosenblum, "Entry on: Myths and Legends of the World: The Bronze Cauldron by Geraldine McCaughrean, Bee Willey", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/270. Entry version as of November 02, 2026.

Geraldine McCaughrean , Bee Willey

Myths and Legends of the World: The Bronze Cauldron

United Kingdom (1997)

TAGS: Cupid Hades Jupiter Psyche Sisyphus Typhon / Typhoeus / Typhaon Venus Zephyrus Zeus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Myths and Legends of the World: The Bronze Cauldron
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1997
First Edition Details	Geraldine McCaughrean, *The Bronze Cauldron*. London: Orion Children's Books, 1997, 130 pp.
ISBN	1858812755
Genre	Fiction, Illustrated works, Instructional and educational works, Myths, Short stories
Target Audience	Children
Author of the Entry	Allison Rosenblum, Bar-Ilan University, allie.rose89@gmail.com
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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



Courtesy of the Author.

Geraldine McCaughrean , b. 1951
(Author)

McCaughrean is a British novelist who currently resides in Berkshire, England. She is a prolific writer, who wrote of over 170 books – mostly children's books but also several historical novels for adults. She won numerous awards for her books. In addition she also wrote a play for the radio and stage-plays. She grew up in North London and studied at Christ Church College of Education, Canterbury.

McCaughrean was the only author who won the Whitbread Children's Book Award three times; she won it for her children's novels: *A Little Lower than the Angels* (1987), *Gold Dust* (1993) and *Not the End of the World* (2004).

Sources:

Official website (accessed: May 28, 2018).

Profile at the literature.britishcouncil.org (accessed: May 28, 2018).

Bio prepared by Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University,
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Questionnaire

1. What drew you to writing / working with Classical Antiquity and what challenges did you face in selecting, representing, or adapting particular myths or stories?

I loved the Classic myths as a child, though the books were a bit dull, illustrated with Greek statuary or Roman urns. There was a resurgence of interest in publishing them for children at the time I

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was newly surfacing as an author, so naturally I leapt at the chance to retell them. The illustrations were a lot better this time round.

The choosing of stories is largely guided by which are best known and (especially nowadays) those which feature on the National Curriculum. That, in turn, is largely guided by which are not too salacious or amoral. The Greek myths win out every time in terms of what the publishers choose to publish and what the schools choose to teach. I am particularly fond, however, of the Epic of Gilgamesh and like to harp on about that whenever I get the chance.

2. Why do you think classical / ancient myths, history, and literature continue to resonate with young audiences?

It is one of the few chances children get to be treated like adults. Since the stories were originally told to a diverse audience, and they are distinctly not "kiddies' stories", young readers/listeners are for once given a glimpse of adults (and gods) behaving badly, death, battle, love, fate and so on, as well as identifying with heroes, superhuman beings and adventurers, all in a heady, sun-and-sea setting. Other "educational" retellings I am asked to write (such as fairy tales) come with a prohibition list of no-nos – knives, soldiers, witches, religion, war, sex, alcohol... All of that goes out of the window with Myth because (of course) such things are the substance of Myth. They are also the substance of Life and there are important things to be said about them – passed on from one generation to the next by means of story.

The sheer strangeness of times-long-gone are intriguing to children. I have never seen the need for "contemporary relevance" when it comes to entrancing children with Story. They can, after all, dart imaginatively through Time and Space with more ease than adults, and relish unquestioningly the most mind-boggling fantasy without turning a hair.

3. Do you have a background in classical education (Latin or Greek at school or classes at the University?) What sources are you using? Scholarly work? Wikipedia? Are there any books that made an impact on you in this respect?

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I'm no classicist. I did do Latin to O-level at school, but none of it has stuck unless residually in my spelling. I wrote a collection of *101 Myths and Legends from Round the World* which helped me see "Classical" myth in its global context, and how its influence travelled far farther afield than the Greeks themselves ever did.

For sources, I don't go to other children's versions, for obvious reasons, but to Robert Graves or adult encyclopaedias of Mythology or Penguin versions of the epics.

4. Did you think about how Classical Antiquity would translate for young readers?

The arrant misogyny and gynophobia of the ancient Greeks are an undoubted problem. Almost every monster is female, almost every female is scheming or dangerous, a snake under her skirts, or only there to be conquered and bedded. Heroes like Hercules get through droves of women – and then there are his dubious shield-bearing beloved boys...

I do an exercise in schools whereby Perseus goes off to kill Medusa clad in all the language of heroism and admirable virtues... and then, as the kid raises his sword to strike, I point out that, by the way, he has abandoned his mother in her hour of need because he fell for a flattering trick and boasted he could kill the gorgon, so has flown off to kill a woman he has never met and knows nothing about – a woman who was transformed and deformed through no fault of her own, and – ooo – who happens to be pregnant with twins when Perseus slashes her head off her shoulders. It's a nice exercise in "viewpoint". ... But of course in retelling the myth in writing I can't do that. I have to be true to the stories I loved myself as a child, and trust to the appeal that has kept them alive and popular for thousands of years.

5. Writers are often more "faithful" to originals in adapting its spirit rather than being tied down at the level of detail – is this something you thought about when writing your stories?

I do feel quite strongly that the tradition – the etiquette, if you like – of storytelling is that while the storyteller has charge of the story it is

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theirs to do with as they like. Which source should I go back to for perfect accuracy, after all? The oldest? The first-time told? Hardly. Where a culture's religion is involved, then it's wrong to mess with a mythic story. But there can be very few Olympian-worshippers these days I could offend by missing out a detail or two. The patchwork-quilt way that the canon of Greek myth grew gives rise to lots of anomalies anyway – e.g. Hercules doing his deal with Atlas at least two generations after Perseus turned Atlas into a mountain.

All the same… when TV series or novelizations credit the wrong heroes with the wrong adventures, I go ape!

As for details… Those three drops of olive oil that Psyche spills on to Cupid's shirt as she takes a peek at him after dark… when you see how they survived over the centuries to turn up as three drops of blubber oil in a telling of East of the Sun and West of the Moon… well it makes you believe that myths have DNA that will survive somehow despite the worst time and interfering storytellers can do to them. Details like that are truly precious.

Prepared by Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com



Courtesy of Bee Willey.

Bee Willey (Illustrator)

Bee was born in London and spent most of her childhood in France. She attended the Bath Academy of Art. In her career since graduation she has worked as a freelance illustrator for numerous clients, creating illustrations for a wide range of books – including over twenty for children – and also posters, montage, magazines, campaigns and emojis. The "sidelights" for Willey at encyclopedia.com include the comment that "her stylistic art has been credited for its eccentric and energetic design". She was shortlisted for the Kate Greenaway Medal in 2003 for *Bob Robber and Dancing Jane.* The many authors she has worked with include Shahrukh Husain, for whom she is the illustrator of *Egypt* (Evans 2004), *Rome* (Evans 2004), *Greece* (Evans 2004), *Indian Myths* (Evans 2005), *The Vikings* (Smart Apple Media 2005) and *African Myths* (Evans 2006).

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Sources:

Profile at the Walker Books Australia website (accessed: June 28, 2018).

Profile at the illustrationcupboard.com (accessed: October 5, 2017).

Profile at the www.wordsandpics.org (accessed: June 28, 2018).

Bee Willey's personal website (accessed: August 15, 2019).

Profile at encyclopedia.com (accessed: September 2, 2019)

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Additional information

Summary	The book offers a retelling of myths from around the world, suitable for children of all ages. (Among the myths we have stories from Mayan culture, Papua New Guinea, Inuit tale, Japanese and more).
Analysis	Retelling of myths from around the world, suitable for children of all ages. The myths cover a broad range of themes and tones, but are all relatively light-hearted, making them appropriate for younger children as well as older readers. Whereas the first two anthologies in this series, *The Golden Hoard* and *The Silver Treasure*, take a more focused approach at explaining the gods' influence in each story, *The Bronze Cauldron* highlights mankind's sense of control, the power they have over their own lives sometimes in defiance of the gods, like Taru who decides to go out and fight Illuyankas, or Sisyphus who thought he could outsmart the gods. All the lore collected in *The Bronze Cauldron* has been passed down orally through the generations, and McCaughrean writes them down here in a dramatic yet fluid way, inserting moments of humor to take away from the darker elements of human nature found in stories like the Mayan myth about Hun-Apu and Xbalanque or the English legend about Billy.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Cupid Hades Jupiter Psyche Sisyphus Typhon / Typhoeus / Typhaon Venus Zephyrus Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Abandonment Authority Character traits Child, children Heroism Humanity Intellect Magic powers Parents (and children) Values

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