Sonya Nevin, "Entry on: Weird World of Wonders: Greeks by Anthony ("Tony") Robinson, Del Thorpe", 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/432. Entry version as of November 11, 2026.

Anthony ("Tony") Robinson , Del Thorpe

Weird World of Wonders: Greeks

United Kingdom (2012)

TAGS: Ancient Slavery Apollo Apples of the Hesperides Architecture Athena Athens Centaur(s) Comedy (Ancient) Cyclops / Cyclopes Graeco-Persian Wars Greek History Greek Music Greek Theatre Hera Heracles Hercules Homer Laurel Wreath Minos Minotaur Odysseus / Ulysses Olympic Games Pandora Pandora's Box Polyphemus Poseidon Tragedy (Ancient) Trojan Horse Trojan War Twelve Labours of Heracles Zeus



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



General information	
Title of the work	Weird World of Wonders: Greeks
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2012
First Edition Details	Tony Robinson, *Weird World of Wonders: Greeks*. London: Pan MacMillan, 2012, pp. 156.
ISBN	9780330533881
Official Website	weirdworldofwonders.com (accessed: July 6, 2018)
Genre	Humor, Illustrated works, Instructional and educational works
Target Audience	Children (7+)
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



Anthony ("Tony") Robinson , b. 1946
(Author)

Sir Anthony Robinson is a well-known and prolific British actor, broadcaster, director, and writer. After co-starring in the historical comedy *Blackadder* for several years, Tony Robinson went on to write and star in the children's television programme, *Maid Marian And Her Merry Men*, a humorous re-working of the Robin Hood legends, as well as providing narration and voice-overs for a number of other children's programmes. He presented the archaeology programme *Time Team* for twenty years, specialising in presenting archaeology to a non-specialist audience. He is the author of several books for adults, including his autobiography, *No Cunning Plan* (2016); and author of numerous children's books, including *Bad Kids: The Naughtiest Children in History*, *Odysseus Superhero* (1996, co-written with Amanda Robinson and Richard Curtis) and the history series *Tony Robinson's Weird World of Wonders*, which emphasises, "all the most important, funny, strange, amazing, smelly and disgusting bits!". His book, *Odysseus: The Greatest Hero of Them All* (1986, co-written with Richard Curtis), was made into an audiobook and a BBC children's television series of the same name (1986).

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



Del Thorpe (Illustrator)

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: Weird World of Wonders: Greeks by Anthony ("Tony") Robinson, Del Thorpe", 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/432. Entry version as of November 11, 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.

Additional information

Adaptations	The book comes with a free downloadable audiobook version at the panmacmillan.com (accessed: July 6, 2018).
Summary	This work is a humorous introduction to the history and culture of ancient Greece. There is significant focus on classical Greece, although there is also some material on the career of Alexander the Great, followed by brief sections on the Hellenistic world and the coming of Rome. In keeping with book's title and the rest of the series of which it is a part, the representation of ancient culture focuses on things that appear eccentric, funny, cruel, or disgusting by modern Western standards. This flippant strain disguises a successful attempt to introduce young people to complex subjects within the sphere of antiquity such as politics, justice, social structures, science, art, religion, and myth.
Analysis	Although this is predominantly a history book, myth is fore-fronted as an integral part of Greek culture, opening with the description of the book as *about ancient Greece a place full of myth and legend, and olive oil and nude athletics*. An early introduction to Greek culture introduces Homer, and Odysseus' adventure with a "giant" (p. 5 and see p. 49 and pp.145–146). Greek pre-history is discussed through historicism, referring to the "soup" of "stories" and "facts" (pp. 9–11): Minos and Minotaur coupled with Knossos; Centaurs and Lapiths with early encounters with nomads; The abduction of Helen and appeal to "king of Mycenae" related to wealth found at Mycenae; The Trojan War discussed in terms of the archaeology of Troy. The history of Athens includes a retelling of the myth of Athena's contest with Poseidon (pp. 15–19), and discussion of acropolis temples and statues (pp. 26–27). This creates the impression of ancient Greek culture as a fascinating, rich mix of material – one which can almost be "solved" by looking through the "weird" to find the truth. Although historicism is not a reliable way to approach myth, the use of this approach here is perhaps intended to appeal to young readers who may enjoy the feeling of being invited to look past the surface to find out more than meets the eye.

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.

A contrast is established between early Greeks who "thought illnesses were a punishment from the gods", and Hippocrates, "who thought all this stuff about the gods was rubbish." While this is an over-simplification of Greek religious thought about illness and about Greek medicine, it does introduce young readers to Greek philosophical/medical culture's distinctive emphasis in on systematic analysis and evidence-based explanations. The tone used here is typical of the book – flippant, playful, and potentially insolent if used by a child in conversation. The use of this tone in a history book is engaging and accessible, creating the impression of including the child in a fairly lively, adult, subversive conversation. This presents history temptingly as something more akin to a topic a child may feel pleased or privileged to be included in rather than something they are obliged to consume as "child-suitable" material.

The life of historical girls is described and related to that of Pandora (*No wonder Pandora opened the box*) (p. 39). This is followed by a retelling of the Pandora myth (pp. 40–41). The retelling relates the post-antiquity tradition in which Pandora is forbidden to open the "box", which is represented, in text and illustration, like a gift box, following the 16th century Lilius Giraldus of Ferrara tradition. However, the account is unusual in explicitly (although semi-humorously) blaming Zeus for leaving the box unlocked. The evils are depicted as bats, bugs, and demons, and described as being *Every single evil thing – Disease, Crime, Hatred, Envy and all the rest*. Pandora has agency here, in the sense that she chooses to open the box, and the narrator is sympathetic to the conditions that would prompt such a choice. In that sense, the book steers clear of reinforcing gender stereotypes around women's curiosity and culpability for life's ills. The narrator is also sympathetic towards the lives of historical girls in antiquity in the way that they describe their lack of choices and so on. This constructive intention offers a way of thinking about the Pandora myth that discourages the young reader from simply absorbing its misogynistic qualities, and it introduces the idea that male and female experiences of ancient culture were different, with opportunities for women being severely curtailed. It is also significant that there is no impression that the book is aimed at either a male or female readership, refraining from excessively gendering the subject. Some parts of this work better than others; there is an unfortunate joke in the section on historical girls – when it is mentioned that girls could not go out to do shopping, the narrator says, "Just imagine if you'd been an ancient Greek girl – what would

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.

you have done on Saturdays?". While this is obviously meant to be both humorous and critical of enforced domestication, it also expresses a crass notion that all modern girls do on Saturdays is shop, and that girls shopping is an inherently ridiculous thing. In a section about ancient sexism this seems somewhat insensitive as it disparages modern girls.

Vases are discussed as depicting "stories of gods and monsters or scenes of daily life" (p. 46); the stories of the Trojan War (with illustration of a Trojan Horse) is discussed as something held in common by the Greeks, and with reference to the shrine of Helen and Menelaus at Sparta (pp. 62–64).

The tradition of Pericles' birth being marked by a lion dream (a semi-modern myth) is related (p. 70; see Plutarch, *Pericles*, 3), adding an element of the fantastic to the historical sections as well as the more clearly mythical. Heracles early years and labours are related, with some questioning of his suitability as a role-model "these days" (pp. 76–77), which, while semi-humorous, nonetheless invites the reader to consider the difference in values between ancient and modern cultures.

Discussion of the Olympics features a profile of Zeus (p.83). Drama is discussed, although not in relation to myth (pp. 96–99; 116–117), perhaps in an attempt to establish or maintain simple categories. Herodotus is profiled (p. 119) for inventing historiography: wanting *to write about what really happened* rather than *thinking up a nice long poem full of heroes, heroines, gods and monsters*, another stress on Greeks as innovators and proponents of rationalism.

An inaccurate Greek alphabet is provided for reference (p. 100). (Its author has attempted to map the Greek onto the modern Latin-English alphabet too closely, so that Greek Chi is given as English "C"; Greek Eta is given as "H"; Greek Theta is given as "Q"; Greek Omega is given as "W"; and Greek Psi as "Y".). This selection seems to have been given in order to make the alphabets seem as alike as possible in order to stress the continued relevance of antiquity; the introductory text notes that "the Greeks came up with lots of the letters we use today."

Classical, Mythological, Ancient Slavery Apollo Apples of the Hesperides Architecture Athena Athens Centaur(s) Comedy (Ancient) Cyclops / Cyclopes Graeco-

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.

Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Persian Wars Greek History Greek Music Greek Theatre Hera Heracles Hercules Homer Laurel Wreath Minos Minotaur Odysseus / Ulysses Olympic Games Pandora Pandora's Box Polyphemus Poseidon Tragedy (Ancient) Trojan Horse Trojan War Twelve Labours of Heracles Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Child's view Gender expectations/construction Heroism History Learning Science Social class Society
Further Reading	Miles, Sarah, "The Odyssey in the 'Broom Cupboard': *Ulysses 31* and *Odysseus: The Greatest Hero of them All* on 'Children's BBC', 1985–86" in Fiona Hobden and Amanda Wrigley, eds., *Ancient Greece on British Television*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018.
Addenda	"History Consultant": Jessica Cobb

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.