Margaret Bromley, "Entry on: Gilbert the Guinea Pig and Other Tales by Bertie Beetle [Hubert de Jaunay] , John Santry", peer-reviewed by Elizabeth Hale and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/483. Entry version as of November 04, 2026.

Bertie Beetle [Hubert de Jaunay] , John Santry

Gilbert the Guinea Pig and Other Tales

Australia (1943)

TAGS: Apollo Bacchus Clytie Gods Golden Touch Midas





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

General information	
Title of the work	Gilbert the Guinea Pig and Other Tales
Country of the First Edition	Australia
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1943
First Edition Details	Bertie Beetle, *Gilbert the Guinea Pig and Other Tales*. Sydney: Consolidated Press, 1943, 65 pp.
ISBN	No ISBN
Available Onllne	nla.gov.au (accessed: August 28, 2018)
Genre	Humor, Illustrated works, Poetry
Target Audience	Children
Author of the Entry	Margaret Bromley, University of New England, brom_ken@bigpond.net.au
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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



Bertie Beetle [Hubert de Jaunay] , 1889 - 1954
(Author)

Author Hubert de Jaunay published under the name Bertie Beetle and resided in south Sydney from the early 1900s until his death in 1954.

Bio prepared by Margaret Bromley, University of New England, mbromle5@une.edu.au, brom_ken@bigpond.net.au



John Santry , 1910 - 1990
(Illustrator)

Illustrator, John Santry was born on December 19, 1910 and grew up in the working class suburb of Pyrmont, Sydney. He attended a strict Catholic school which allowed the children to draw on Friday afternoons. In his first job after leaving school, he worked amongst artists at Paramount Pictures, cleaning the studio artists' brushes. After studying art part time as East Sydney Technical College, he worked, firstly, as a commercial artist at Paramount Pictures, and subsequently as a black and white artist on *Truth* magazine. After working in advertising, in the 1930s Santry worked on *Labor Daily* as a cartoonist.

Santry married Marie G. Byrne (d.u.) and moved to England, where he studied at the Westminster School and shared a studio with, amongst others, renowned Australian modernist artists, William Dobell and Donald Friend.

After several years in the United Kingdom, shortly before the outbreak of World War Two, the Santrys moved back to Australia with their two young children, where John Santry joined the staff of Australian Consolidated Press as a "creative artist". In the latter years of his career, Santry also taught drawing to architecture students at Sydney

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University.

There is very little information on his wife, Marie Santry, an artist and painter. It is apparent that they collaborated on the illustrations of this anthology of stories for young readers.

Source:

More info at trove.nla.gov.au (accessed: March 15, 2018)

Bio prepared by Margaret Bromley, University of New England, mbromle5@une.edu.au, brom_ken@bigpond.net.au

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Additional information

Summary

The Sunflower tells of the nymph Clytie and her unrequited love for Apollo. Giving in to despair, she stays rooted to the ground, her face bound to follow the sun, the god Apollo.

The Golden Touch depicts a version of the King Midas story. When Midas begs the “golden touch” from the god, Bacchus, his clothing, food and his little daughter all turn to gold. After he goes to the river to wash off the curse, there is a permanent residue of gold dust on the river bed.

Analysis

The book is generously illustrated for an Australian children’s book of its time, considering wartime paper shortages. The poems cover double page spreads, of which every second page, the right hand page, is a watercolour.

In the illustration of *The Sunflower*, amidst the green, yellow and orange watercolour, Clytie’s dejected face forms the centre of the sunflower. Through her pathos and suffering Beetle constructs Clytie as a victim of Apollo’s abandonment, which is antithetical to the narrative of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* iv 204, 234–256. Ovid tells of "the mad Clytie whose head is turned by the sun", suggesting that she was foolish, to be besotted by a man, Helios, who had abandoned her for another. Clytie’s vindictive jealousy of Helios/Apollo’s love for Leucothoe spurns his hatred of her. So, she pines away, sitting naked on a rock, transfixed on the distant Apollo, and is transformed into a sunflower (helianthus) or a heliotrope, upon her death. "Her ghastly pallor…[gives her the]…appearance of a bloodless plant: but part was reddened and a flower hid her face" (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* iv. 256–273).

Beetle distills the myth to a romanticised tale of unrequited love in which Clytie’s desperate behaviour leads to her own demise. Santry’s water colour evokes a sad silly girl dressed up as a brightly clad sunflower. Published during the changing role of women in the 1940s when they were taking agency with regards to their economic role in the community and, to an extent, their own sexuality, Beetle’s portrayal of irrational love is a conservative exemplar for younger readers.

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Beetle's story of *The Golden Touch*, adapted from Nathanial Hawthorne's *A Wonder Book for Girls and Boys* (1852) presents the tragedy of avarice for King Midas, for whom an unnamed stranger transmutes all he has into gold, and whose young daughter proves to be the most important joy of his life. In the Santry illustration King Midas is facing the viewer, dressed in a red and blue robe set against a glowing yellow background, depicting a friendly father figure emanating warmth and love. (This illustration is omitted from the online version). Traditional story illustrations depict Midas in white or gold robes in static austere poses. In Beetle's narrative, King Midas's subsequent atonement from Bacchus restores the catastrophe of his greedy ambitions to normality, suggesting that he moved on to enjoy the simple pleasures in life, such as the scent of the roses in his garden, but especially the love of his young daughter.

The two rhyming tales from Greek mythology are included in this anthology amongst tales of koala, kookaburra, kangaroo and platypus as well as a caricatured naked frizzy haired Aboriginal child. Described as a "little hunting black", with a boomerang beside him, his large eyes and exaggerated red lips, he is ridiculed by being hit on the backside by the kangaroo that he was attempting to kill.

A specific local reference is made in the poem, *A Trip to the Museum in College Street*, The Australian Museum, the first public museum in Australia, to see skeletons with their "outsides off and insides out".

Santry's representation of the Aboriginal child promotes Aboriginal people as primitive and forever childlike, whilst the "skeletons in the museum", supports a contemporary view of Aboriginal people as "living fossils". The Australian Museum had been an avid collector of Aboriginal remains since the 1860s and during the 1940s the skeletons of Aboriginal people were on display in several Australian museums.

The Australian content appealed to the child reader's sense of place and appreciation of the exoticism of the country's natural fauna, but it also promotes a sense of cultural superiority to the Aboriginal people. Whilst *The Sunflower* and *The Golden Touch* ensured some familiarity with traditional classic mythology, their inclusion engages with the desire to transmit intergenerational literary icons as integral to the pursuit of higher levels of social and moral progress, especially during the War, a time of social instability.

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	Consolidated Press was associated mostly with newspaper publication, the new building in 1925 reflected an important period of the modernisation of Sydney in the inter war years.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Apollo Bacchus Clytie Gods Golden Touch Midas
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Character traits Emotions Love Parents (and children) Relationships
Further Reading	Hawthorne, Nathaniel, *A Wonder Book and Tanglewood Tales*, Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 1972.

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