Margaret Bromley, "Entry on: Myths and Legends of Many Lands by Percival Richard Cole", peer-reviewed by Elizabeth Hale and Elzbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/485. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

Percival Richard Cole

Myths and Legends of Many Lands

Australia (1933)

TAGS: Acrisius / Akrisios Andromeda Apollo Argos / Argus Panoptes (Giant) Ceres Cyane Danae Demeter Dictys Gorgon(s) Hermes Medusa Mercury Perseus Phaethon Pluto / Plouton Proserpina Zeus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Myths and Legends of Many Lands
Country of the First Edition	Australia
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1933
First Edition Details	Percival R. Cole, *Myths and Legends of Many Lands*. Melbourne, Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1933, 127 pp. “Greek Myths” pp. 57–76.
ISBN	No ISBN
Genre	Adaptations, Fables, Myths, Short stories
Target Audience	Children (Upper primary to early secondary school level, ages 8 to 14.)
Author of the Entry	Margaret Bromley, University of New England, brom_ken@bigpond.net.au
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Creators



Percival Richard Cole (Author)

Percival R. Cole was an educationist, academic and a poet. He was born in Muswellbrook, a rural town in New South Wales, on the 18th of May, 1879, where his Irish born father was a schoolteacher, practising during the beginnings of the modern Australian “free, compulsory and secular” public school system. Cole was educated in New South Wales public schools, firstly at Granville North Public School, NSW from 1885–1891 and at Sydney Boys High School from 1892-1895. In 1896, in a new era of teacher training and education in NSW, Cole became a pupil-teacher at Glebe Superior High School, which combined primary and secondary education and in 1900 went to Fort Street Training School, as a trainee student teacher. In 1900 he was awarded a three year scholarship to the University of Sydney, graduating in 1903 with a Bachelor of Arts with first class honours in history and philosophy, winning the University Medal in philosophy. In 1905 he was awarded a Master of Arts with first class honours in modern history.

Cole continued his studies in England, attending the London Day College, and in 1906 was awarded the University of London Diploma of Education with first class honours. He was subsequently awarded a PhD in Education from Columbia University, New York, where, from 1908-09, he taught the history of education. He returned to Australia in 1910 to take up the position of vice principal and lecturer in the history of education at the newly established Sydney Teachers’ College, a position he held until his retirement in 1944.

Percival Cole was at the forefront of educational reform and teacher education in New South Wales, writing academic texts and classroom material for Australian teachers and school children at a time when the teaching profession had had to rely almost entirely on overseas publications. He published widely on the philosophy and history of education, civics education and on classroom practice.

Source:

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Bio at adb.anu.edu.au (accessed: September 28, 2018).

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Additional information

Summary

Greek Myths:

I. "The Fall of Phaeton" is the story of how the sun departed from its course "scorching the surface of the earth, bringing misery to mankind".

Phaeton, Apollo's son was "not as wise as he was handsome". "Vain and ambitious" he defied his father and drove Apollo's chariot of the sun with its four noble steeds from Apollo's palace to the ocean. The horses, uncomfortable with their driver, went off the track and wreaked havoc, causing streams to dry up and forests to catch fire. Consequently "The Ethiopians were more seriously scorched than the other races of men, so that they turned black, and their descendants are the negroes of to-day" (p. 57). The great Zeus hurled Phaeton from the chariot by a thunderbolt.

II."Proserpine and the Spring" explains the seasons of summer and winter. It tells of the Greek god, Zeus and Demeter or the Roman god Jupiter and goddess, Ceres, whose daughter, Proserpine, is carried away by Pluto to the Underworld. Ceres has no idea of who has abducted her daughter, so she appeals to Zeus. "Zeus would have restored Proserpine, but that she had eaten some seeds of a pomegranate in the Under-World, which gave her husband Pluto the right to keep her" (p. 57). Ceres refuses to give harvests until her daughter is returned.

III. "Perseus and the Gorgon" introduces a range of characters; Acrisius, the king of Argos, his daughter Danae, Dictys the fisherman, Perseus, Pallas the spirit, the Three Gray Sisters, Nymphs, Mercury with his winged sandals, and Medusa the Gorgon. Whilst the narrative tells of how Perseus "had rid the world of its most foul and cruel monster", his mother remains enslaved to the cruel king (p. 62).

IV. In **"Perseus and Andromeda",** Perseus defeats the Gorgon, saves and marries Andromeda and destroys his enemies by turning them to stone with the Gorgon's head.

V. In "**Home and Retribution"** Perseus continues his journey and takes the Gorgon's head to King Acrisius which turns him and his guests to a ring of stones, therebydefeating the wicked king and releasing his mother from slavery. Perseus declares that "Those whom

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the gods help fulfill their promises, and those who despise them, reap as they have sown" (p. 66).

VI. "The Quest of the Golden Fleece" begins on Mount Helion, where Jason is mentored by the heroes; the strong Hercules, Orpheus the singer, Asclepius the physician, and Aenieas of Troy. Also present is Chiron, the wise Centaur who offers Jason the advice to "Speak civilly to all whom you meet and perform all that you promise" as Jason sets out on his quest to retrieve his father's kingdom from his uncle Pelias(p.67). Whist forging a raging river, putting himself at risk, Jason carries an old woman across the river, at her request. Unknowingly to him, the old woman is Hera, the Queen of Olympus, wife of Zeus and protector of the heroes. He loses a precious sandal in this feat. As he limps with one sandal into the city of Iolchis, a prophecy is realised as the inhabitants are waiting eagerly for a stranger with one sandal to become their king.

VII. "The Winning of the Fleece". King Pelias challenges Jason to retrieve the golden fleece in return for his rightful kingdom. Jason builds the Argus ship and recruits the Argonauts for the quest, which is further complicated by Pelias's additional demands to tame two fire breathing bulls to work a plough and sew a field of dragon's teeth. The King's daughter, Medea, leads him to the dragon guarding the golden fleece and gives Jason a charm to increase his strength seven times, enabling him to win the quest.

Cole concludes: "So runs the story of Jason and the good ship Argus, and of how they won the golden fleece. I think that the myth grew out of a real trading expedition in search of wool for Greece. Do not hundreds of vessels sail aboard yearly for the golden fleece? And are there not perils and difficulties to be met with still? Must not traders and merchants have enterprise and courage to-day as of old? (p. 70).

VIII. "The Riddle of the Sphinx" tells of Oedipus, "seeking his fortune in the ancient days before Greece became great". Oedipus's slaying of his unrecognised father is acknowledged as "rashness, not deliberate wickedness" (p. 71).

IX. "The Story of Theseus" tells of how, upon discovering that he is the son of the King of Attica, Theseus battles great monsters (and monstrous men) to prove himself to his father, including seeking retribution for King Minos's demands for the sacrifice of seven maids and seven youths from Attica.

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King Minos possesses an intricate maze, made by Daedalus who manages to escape it by fabricating a pair of wings, fastened to his body with beeswax. Daedalus's son, Icarus, similarly escapes but flies too close to the sun. The wax melts and he falls into the sea and drowns.

When Theseus challenges King Minos's cruel autocracy Ariadne, Minos's daughter, falls in love with him and helps him to free the prisoners and they set sail for Crete. "[B]ut somehow, Ariadne is left on the island of Naxos", and in his "thoughtlessness", Theseus forgets to lower the black sails of his ship (p. 73) leading to the tragic consequences when his father, Aegeus, throws himself into the sea.

X. "The Return of Ulysses" recounts how as "One of the bravest, and quite the wisest hero that fought against Troy…" Ulysses's enforced ten year separation from "his dear wife, Penelope, and his young son, Telemachus", tests their loyalty and love for each another (Cole, 1933, p.76). Disguised as an old beggar he returns to defend Penelope against the suitors who all assume he is dead. Aided by his son, Telemachus, Ulysses's skills as a marksman enable him to retrieve his family and his land to live "happily to a good old age" (p. 80).

Analysis

Several of the Greek myths in this anthology were originally published in Cole's *Civics and Morals*, 1905. The selection of myths and legends for this collection addresses a perceived need for classroom literature: "Classical Myths, fairy tales etc., the acquaintance of every well-educated person" (Cole, 1933, Introduction). The text and tone of *Myths and Legends of Many Lands* remains unchanged from the 1905 paperback version. With the exception of a hardback cover and green cloth binding, the quality of paper is improved and it is altogether a more robust publication. The frontispiece black and white photograph of "The Ruins of Ancient Rome, The Arch of Titus" promotes the publication as a work of classical scholarship for classroom reading.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the market for "educational" publishing in Australia responded to the optimism of the modern world, its incumbent technological change and widening opportunities for employment. However, by the 1930s, when this book was published, with the distress of the Great Depression educational opportunities had become dissipated as economic circumstances

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prevented some children from continuing school (see here, accessed: August 28, 2018).

Cole's classroom text promotes the universal appeal of myths and legends, appealing to "all classes of readers" (an ambiguous reference to social class, that could be read as "school classes") but predominantly to "young minds…not only because of the interest which they must possess in order to have survived, but also because they belong to the period when civilization, as we measure it by modern standards, was young" (Cole, 1933, Introduction).

Accordingly, Cole advocates that familiarity with Greek myths and legends as well as traditional European myths, tales and fables; Roman historical tales and a few Australian and New Zealand legends as integral to a good education. In defence of his inclusion of Maori and Aboriginal mythology, Cole notes "elements of the beautiful and the graceful" that have "great appeal to the imagination…Even legends that are crude" (Cole, 1933, Introduction).

In the 1930s "White Australians held numerous and conflicting views of Aborigines, ranging from the sympathetic and humanitarian to the violently racist and bigoted", attitudes which percolated through literature for adults (Shoemaker, 1989, p.18). In *Myths and Legends of Many Lands* Cole's appreciation of the moral and civilising potential of Classical Mythology is juxtaposed against the exotic other, the marginalised Indigenous peoples of Australia and New Zealand: "In the tales of the Maoris and the Australian Aborigines, weird as they sometimes seem, the reader will find no scarcity of attractive matter for thought. Who would willingly be so negligent, so forgetful, so ungracious as to despise or ignore the childhood of the race?" (Cole, 1933, Introduction). Despite this attempt at embracing Aboriginal children, it is unclear that Cole's works would have been part of this assumed educational audience .

The final Greek myth, "The Return of Ulysses" is the most detailed retelling in this anthology. The text assumes an antiquated tone, conveying multiple moral lessons: "Fire flashed from the eye of Ulysses, but well had his spirit learned the lesson of self-control" (Cole, 1933. p. 78) and "Punishment awaited the idle and insulting men who had devoured another man's goods for so long" (Cole, 1933, p. 79).

The final paragraph describes the battle between Ulysses and the

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suitors for his wife, Penelope: “but Heaven was on the side of the rightful king, and he slew them all in the end, he and his son and their servants…Thus the wicked were punished…” (Cole, 1933, p. 80). Thus, with the invocation of Heaven Ulysses is enabled to live to a happy and peaceful old age.

Cole’s didacticism entices reader identification and empathy with characters and their predicaments. The consequences of disobeying parental advice or denying a husband’s rights to his wife are integrated with contemporary “common sense”. The selection of Greek myths highlights gender inequity: while certain daughters of kings, such as Ariadne and Medea, are disloyal to their powerful fathers and keen to escape paternal captivity for true love, some Greek heroes found love through their exploits; as Theseus found Ariadne and Perseus found Andromeda. However, the detail of her Ethopian ancestry is omitted from the narrative. Overall, the tragedies of the original myths are sublimated for happy or ambiguous endings. Cole’s summation of “The Winning of The Fleece”, promotes the golden fleece as a symbol of prosperity, for up until the spectre of The Great Depression loomed, Australia had been “riding on the sheep’s back” for fifty years.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Acrisius / Akrisios Andromeda Apollo Argos / Argus Panoptes (Giant) Ceres Cyane Danae Demeter Dictys Gorgon(s) Hermes Medusa Mercury Perseus Phaethon Pluto / Plouton Proserpina Zeus

Further Reading

Shoemaker, Adam, *Black Words, White Page: Aboriginal Literature 1929–1988*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1989;

ab-ed.nesa.nsw.edu.au (accessed: August 28, 2018)

Addenda

Contents:

Fairy Tales. Fables. Australian and New Zealand Legendary Tales. Greek Myths. Tales from Roman History. Norse Myths. Tales from Modern History.

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The frontispiece has a black and white photograph of “The Ruins of Ancient Rome, the Arch of Titus” (unacknowledged). There are no illustrations in the book.

Three Aboriginal and three Maori tales are included in this collection. Whereas Maoris are specifically mentioned in their stories, the subjects of the Aboriginal stories are referred to as “natives” and “native tribes”; the characters have no names, no family connections and the events take place in unspecified geographical locations. “A deep gorge in Central Australia” (Cole, 1933, p. 48) could be one of many locations in this vast country. This is in contrast to the information provided to readers of the Greek legends. Family members, particularly parentage, and physical locales all form part of the myths enacted out by named characters. Whilst these Greek myths celebrate the deeds and challenges of individuals, through commonly accessible information, Cole’s version of Aboriginal mythology reflects the prevailing lack of information on behalf of white writers with regards to their culture, but it also serves to locate Aboriginal people in the remote past, quarantined from notions of progress and development, whilst lacking the colourful heroes of Greek and Roman civilizations.

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