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Caroline Bruce Cooney

# On the Seas to Troy / Goddess of Yesterday: A Tale of Troy

*United Kingdom*

TAGS: Euneus Hector Helen Hermione Medusa Menelaus Paris (Trojan Prince) Trojan War Troy






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

| General information | |
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| *Title of the work* | On the Seas to Troy / Goddess of Yesterday: A Tale of Troy |
| *Country of the First Edition* | United Kingdom |
| *Country/countries of popularity* | Worldwide |
| *Original Language* | English |
| *First Edition Details* | Caroline B. Cooney, *On the Seas to Troy*. London: Delacorte Press, 2002, 224 pp.<br>Republished, and more widely known, as *Goddess of Yesterday: A Tale of Troy*, London: Delacorte Press 2009, 274 pp. |
| *ISBN* | 9780330415194 |
| *Awards* | 2003 – ALA Notable Book for Older Readers |
| *Genre* | Drama, Romance fiction |
| *Target Audience* | Young adults |
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## Creators



**Caroline Bruce Cooney , b. 1947**
**(Author)**

Caroline B. Cooney was born in Geneva, New York, and had a happy and idyllic childhood growing up in Old Greenwich, Connecticut. She was influenced by her sixth grade teacher, Mr Albert, who introduced her to the ancient world. She went on to learn Latin and ancient Greek and reads both languages well, though found Egyptian hieroglyphs very difficult. In the late 1960s she attended a number of colleges, including Indiana University and the University of Connecticut, but did not complete a degree.

She has published more than ninety young adult novels, selling an estimated 15 million copies worldwide. A number of her books have been translated into other languages. Her work spans the genres of suspense, mystery, romance and historical fiction. *The Face on the Milk Carton* (1990) sold over three million copies and was adapted as a film for television. Her most recent book, *No Such* Person, was published in 2015. She lives in South Carolina.

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## Additional information

Translation

German: *Anaxandra: Eine Prinzessin in Troja*, trans. Gabriele Haefs, Regensburg: Carlsen, 2002.

Summary

Six-year-old Anaxandra is abducted from her family's humble island by a pirate king named Nicander. After inadvertently revealing the location of her father's hidden treasure hoard, she loses all value as a hostage, but remains in the household of Nicander, who turns out to be a kind man. Anaxandra grows up as a playmate for his sickly daughter Callisto. But when she is twelve, another band of pirates attacks Siphnos, slaughter Nicander and lay waste to his kingdom. Miraculously, Anaxandra survives the carnage, and through a clever impersonation of dread goddess Medusa, manages to drive the bandits away. She buries the king and remains alone on the devastated island until discovered by Menelaus on his return from a trading mission to Troy. When Menelaus mistakenly assumes she is the daughter of the murdered Nicander, Anaxandra does not correct him, and motivated by a strong will to survive, ends up declaring herself to be Callisto, claiming both her identity and her birthright. Menelaus takes her home with him to Sparta, where Helen is the only one to see through Anaxandra's ruse. Helen hates her with a passion, and makes her life a misery.

When Helen elopes with Paris, Anaxandra, still impersonating Callisto, takes the place of Hermione in Helen's retinue to Troy. She acts as nursemaid to Menelaus and Helen's baby son Pleisthenes (Cooney draws upon a fragment of the Epic Cycle poem the *Cypria* to supply Helen and Menelaus with a son), whom Helen insists on taking with her to Troy, though Pleis is neglected when it does not suit her to appear as a loving mother. As Troy grows ever more hostile to the son of Menelaus, Anaxandra realises that it is her responsibility to keep the little boy safe. In the story's climax, she escapes Troy through an underground tunnel, crosses the plain, and reunites the baby with his loving father. Menelaus arranges for Anaxandra to be sent to Lemnos, where, it is implied, a happier life for her awaits with her friend Euneus.



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Analysis

Like many other retellings of the tale of Troy, Cooney blends traditional characters well known from the mythic tradition with her own inventions, including her protagonist, Anaxandra. The way in which Anaxandra repeatedly appropriates other identities – first Callisto, and then Hermione – reflects Cooney's own act of writing a young girl into the hallowed story of the Trojan War. As the focalising character, Anaxandra allows child readers privileged access to the visceral experience of the Trojan War. Her first person narrative is compelling and detailed. She witnesses key events that loom large in the mythic tradition: the charged first encounter between Paris and Helen; the celebrations of the Trojans as Helen enters their city while Cassandra's prophesies of doom go unheard and unheeded; and Helen standing on the battlements surveying the battlefield below, exulting in the sight of two armies fighting for her. When Paris arrives at Sparta, Anaxandra knows that she should keep away, but finds she 'could not bear to miss anything' (p. 97). By extension, readers of the story are also permitted to observe these significant events.

The text's portrayal of Helen is unique within young adult versions of the Troy story. Where other authors, such as Roger Lancelyn Green in *The Luck of Troy* (1961), cast her as a hapless victim of the gods or the politics of men, Cooney's Helen is a figure with considerable power and influence. Anyone in her presence 'breathed in her rhythm and looked where her eyes looked' (p. 75). And yet in spite of her mystique, the text makes clear, she remains subject to the decisions of her husband. Although her cruelty towards Anaxandra and her neglect of her own son makes her hard to sympathise with, the text nevertheless offers significant insights into her psychology. Helen and Menelaus are an incompatible couple; with Paris, Helen finds her male complement. The ancient queen Aethra, mother of Theseus, whom Helen rejoices in seeing brought low, proposes that Helen is jealous of Anaxandra because of the attention Menelaus bestows on her. This text highlights the flexibility of the mythic tradition in characterising the well known characters of the saga. It explores the role of women within the ancient world, and their relationships.

At the same time as addressing issues of power, gender and identity, the text also features elements of a teen romance. In Troy Anaxandra is introduced to Hector's friend Euneus, the king of Lemnos. Cooney follows Homer in keeping Euneus as a neutral figure during the war, but she develops her own portrait of him by making him young, handsome and nice. He takes her for a horseback ride and gives her a puppy to replace the one she lost as a child. After the exhilarating



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horse ride, he kisses her, and on their second meeting, he shows her 'other things that were perfect' (p. 206). The phrase is oblique, but in the context of their flirtations, seems to refer to some sort of sexual liaison, though only in the most euphemistic terms.

With Pleisthenes as an exemplar, the sacred status of children is asserted throughout the narrative. Anaxandra declares she 'hated stories where children died' (p. 51). Like many moments within the text, this comment appears to have metafictional significance for Cooney's own narrative. *On the Seas to Troy* is not a story in which children die, but one in which they, and those who love them, are celebrated. Anaxandra later declares that she 'loved how Menelaus loved his children.' (p. 92) Helen might find him an ineffectual warlord, but readers are encouraged to follow Anaxandra in appreciating Menelaus' qualities as a nurturing father.

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| Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts | Euneus Hector Helen Hermione Medusa Menelaus Paris (Trojan Prince) Trojan War Troy |
| Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture | Authority Child, children Emotions Family Femininity Gender, female Heroism Identity Love Religious beliefs Resilience Romance Superstition Survival War |
| Further Reading | Engberg, Gillian, "Grrrls of the ancient world", *The Booklist* 99.9 (2003): 871.<br><br>Reynolds, Angela J., "'Goddess of Yesterday' Book Review", *School Library Journal* 48.6 (June 2002): 134. |



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