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Maurice Saxby , John Winch

# The Millennium Book of Myth and Story

*Australia (1997)*

TAGS: Baucis Daedalus Eurydice Icarus Jupiter Mercury Midas Orpheus Pandora Philemon Prometheus Zeus






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

| General information | |
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| *Title of the work* | The Millennium Book of Myth and Story |
| *Country of the First Edition* | Australia |
| *Country/countries of popularity* | Australia |
| *Original Language* | English |
| *First Edition Date* | 1997 |
| *First Edition Details* | Maurice Saxby, ill. John Winch, *The Millennium Book of Myth and Story*. Alexandria NSW: Millennium Books, 1997, 190 pp. |
| *ISBN* | 1864290412 |
| *Genre* | Myths |
| *Target Audience* | Crossover (older children, crossover) |
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## Creators



**Maurice Saxby , 1924 - 2014**
**(Author)**

Maurice Saxby (born Henry Maurice Saxby, also known as H.M. Saxby) was an author, educator and academic recognised as an international authority on children's literature, specialising in writing by Australian authors. He was a passionate advocate for providing children with quality literature, and his multi-volume *A History of Australian Children's Literature* remains a seminal resource on the subject. He published several anthologies of traditional folktales, including *The Great Deeds of the Superheroes* (1989) and *The Great Deeds of Heroic Women* (1990), and *The Millennium Book of Myth and Story* (1997).

In 1958 he was named the first national president of the Children's Book Council of Australia, and later became a life member of the organisation. He also served as a member of the judging panel for several Australian and international literary awards, including the Hans Christian Andersen Award, the NSW Premier's Literary Awards and the Children's Book Council of Australia. He was awarded an Order of Australia medal in 1995.

He died on November 30, 2014. His legacy has been memorialised in several ways. The School Library Association of New South Wales presents the Maurice Saxby Award, recognising an individual, team or organisation who displays excellence and passion in promoting reading and writing for young people in NSW. The Children's Book Council of Australia hosts the Maurice Saxby Lecture biannually. And the Maurice Saxby Mentorship Program supports emerging writers of children's fiction.

Bio prepared by Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com



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**John Winch , 1944 - 2007**
**(Illustrator)**

John Winch was an Australian artist, illustrator, and writer of children's books. Born in Sydney, he attended Sydney Teacher's College, the National Art School, and the College of Fine Arts. Prior to becoming a full time artist, he worked as a teacher both in England and Australia, and as an industrial designer. During his lifetime he held more than 80 solo exhibitions in Australia, as well as exhibiting work at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris and the Guggenheim Museum in New York. His paintings feature in many Australian university collections, public and government buildings, including Parliament House in Canberra, and have received numerous art awards.

He wrote and illustrated a number of children's books, and collaborated with a range of Australian writers, including Ursula Dubosarsky and Patricia Hooper, to illustrate others. His work reveals an enduring engagement with art history and traditions of representation, both in an Australian and international context. *The Old Man Who Loved to Sing* (1993) and T*he Old Woman Who Loved to Read* (1996) both celebrate the Australian bush, while Run Hare Run (2005) imagines the story behind the creation of Albrecht Durer's painting The Hare. His contribution to the field of children's literature was recognised in 2002 when he was made the May Gibbs Fellow in Children's Literature at the University of Canberra. He died in 2007.

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## Additional information

Summary

The text includes retellings of six classical myths: Prometheus' theft of fire, Pandora's Box, Orpheus and Eurydice, Midas and the Golden Touch, Daedalus and Icarus, and Baucis and Philemon. These myths are grouped with stories from other cultures, including China, North America, India, and Africa, among others. Other stories are drawn from the Old and New Testament, Egyptian and Norse mythology, and Aboriginal Australia. The 33 myths are arranged into ten sections that emphasise their overarching, archetypal themes, charting a narrative arc that begins with creation stories and concludes with tales of the end of the world. There are sections on myths which represent core elements of the human experience, including love, retribution, and encounters with the divine. The recurring motifs of the loss of paradise and resurrection also feature.

The stories are framed by Saxby's discussion, in both introductory and concluding sections, reflecting on the enduring power of story and its importance for humankind. In 'Some Recurring Patterns in Myth and Literature', he comments on key archetypes and highlights their appearance in children's classics (such as Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*) and contemporary Australian children's literature (Ruth Park's *Playing Beatie Bow*, for example). Both Saxby's written text and Winch's accompanying illustrations have a serious, scholarly tone, which is underscored by the physical weight of the hardback format of the book.

Analysis

As in Saxby's other cross-cultural collections of myths, *The Great Deeds of the Superheroes* (1989) and *The Great Deeds of Heroic Women* (1990), the classical stories dominate the collection. Saxby ends his introductory discussion 'Beyond the Facts' with a special celebration of Greek myths. 'Because the world owes so much to Greek culture, and because the Greeks were such superb storytellers… and had such a rich literature, myths from the Greek sources are perhaps among the best known in the world' (p. 9). That said, the format and structure of this text places greater emphasis on the shared narrative elements across cultures than in Saxby's previous work.

The retellings of classical myth maintain a high degree of fidelity to



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the ancient sources, though Saxby says that he has 'sometimes smoothed out or telescoped part of the action' and added detail or dialogue (p. 9). His account of the myth of Daedalus and Icarus draws heavily on Ovid's version, and the retellings of the stories of Prometheus and Pandora remain close to Hesiod, though it is a box, rather than a jar, which Pandora opens. Similarly, the text follows the popular rather than ancient tradition in giving Midas a daughter, whose transformation into gold forms the narrative climax in which the king realises his folly.

Winch's artworks showcase the breadth of his skills as a painter, sculptor and ceramicist. In the Introduction, Saxby writes that Winch 'immersed himself in archetypal images from many cultures and periods in history' that helped him to produce artworks that represent 'the soul' of each story (p. 3).

The story of King Midas is accompanied by a sculpture of a green gecko, sitting among a bed of stones. The creature's bulging eyes and outstretched toes make it appear convincingly alive, but its tail and lower leg have been immobilised in gold. 'Baucis and Philemon and the Miraculous Pitcher' is illustrated by a painting of the simple food – bread, olives, honeycomb, eggs – that the couple serve to Jupiter and Mercury. In contrast to the lizard, this image is idealised rather than realistic, with vibrant colours on a cross-hatched blue background. The stylistic diversity of Winch's illustrations underscores the differences in the stories Saxby retells, yet the overarching message of the book highlights their common ground.

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| Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts | Baucis Daedalus Eurydice Icarus Jupiter Mercury Midas Orpheus Pandora Philemon Prometheus Zeus |
| Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture | Morality Socialisation Storytelling Tradition Values |



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| Addenda | Cross cultural collection of myths, with additional reference material. |



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