Miriam Riverlea, "Entry on: The Pig Who Saved the World by Paul Shipton", 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/570. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

Paul Shipton

The Pig Who Saved the World

England (2006)

TAGS: Circe Homer Labyrinth Midas Odysseus / Ulysses Odyssey Orpheus Polyphemus Proteus Sibyl Sirens Sisyphus Thanatos Tithonus Underworld





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

General information	
Title of the work	The Pig Who Saved the World
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom, North America
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2006
First Edition Details	Paul Shipton, *The Pig Who Saved the World*. London: Penguin, 2006, 260 pp.
ISBN	9780141316352
Awards	2006 – Nestlé Bronze Award (9–11 years age category)
Genre	Action and adventure fiction, Humor, Illustrated works, Novels
Target Audience	Children (recommended age range 10–14)
Author of the Entry	Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com
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Creators



Paul Shipton , b. 1963
(Author)

Paul Shipton is a writer of humorous children's books, including two set in the world of Greek mythology: *The Pig Scrolls: by Gryllus the Pig* (2004) and its sequel, *The Pig Who Saved the World* (2006). Born in Manchester in 1963, he attended Emmanuel College, Cambridge and Manchester University. He completed Masters degrees in both Classics and Philosophy. He spent several years teaching English as a foreign language, including a year in Turkey, before turning to freelance writing and editing. He published his first book, *Zargon Zoo*, in 1991, followed by *Bug Muldoon and the Garden of Fear* (1995) and its sequel *Bug Muldoon and the Killer in the Rain* (2000). Other works include *The Mighty Skink* (1996) and *The Man who was Hate* (2000). He is also the author of the *Pigs in Planes* books for younger readers, writing under the penname Paul Cooper. He divides his time between Cambridge in England and Madison, Wisconsin.

Sources:

web.archive.org (accessed: October 12, 2018);

en.wikipedia.org (accessed: October 12, 2018);

global.oup.com(accessed: October 12, 2018).

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Additional information

Adaptations

In 2010 it was reported that DreamWorks Animation had bought the rights for *Pig Scrolls* and the sequel *The Pig Who Saved the World*. Directed by Barry Sonnenfeld, the project is still classified as being in development.

Summary

This comic adventure novel is a sequel to *The Pig Scrolls,* starring a pig named Gryllus. Gryllus was one of Odysseus' crewmen who was transformed into a pig by Circe. When the rest of the sailors were returned to their human form, he hid in the bushes, and after being found by Sibyl, a courageous prophetess, and Homer, an awkward teenage poet, goes on to (unwittingly and unwillingly) save the world.

In the sequel, *The Pig Who Saved the World*, Gryllus and his friends go back to the island of Aeaea to persuade the witch to return him to his human form. Circe is not there, but he meets Tithonus the ancient grasshopper, who reveals that the gods and goddesses, including Circe, have been kidnapped by the evil king Sisyphus and imprisoned in the Underworld. Sibyl has a dream containing the prophecy 'NOBODY CAN DEFEAT THE BEAST IN THE DARK/ NO ONE CAN SAVE THE COSMOS', and in spite of its deflating message, leads the group on a new quest, transported by a crew of monkey sailors (who have been transformed by the power of Circe's island).

Along the way they get trapped in Polyphemus' cave (where Gryllus has been before, with Odysseus), where they discover the disembodied head of Orpheus, who joins their motley crew.After being swallowed by a sea monster, Gryllus arrives on Crete, where an army, led by King Midas and his gold-loving daughter Aurelia, has gathered to fight against Sisyphus. With Thanatos out of action, no one can die, even of the gravest of injuries. In spite of his terror, Gryllus enters the labyrinth, where he encounters the shape-shifting Proteus. He travels through a portal to Olympus, where Tithonus is revealed to be the true architect of the plot to destroy the world. Bent on revenge for the curse of his eternal existence, he has arranged for Thanatos to unleash the monster Typhon from the Underworld.

Gryllus returns to the labyrinth to discover that with Death back in the world, Sibyl has been killed. Grief-stricken, he finds the courage to

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continue the quest, and discovers an unlikely ally in Polyphemus, who has followed him to Crete. They descend to the Underworld, where Thanatos is beginning to release Typhon from Tartarus. The Cyclops punches Thanatos in the face before Homer and the monkey sailors squash him beneath Sisyphus' boulder. In the happy aftermath of this victory, Orpheus is reunited with his body, as well as with his beloved Eurydice. While they remain in the Elysian fields, Sibyl comes back to life.Tithonus has finally died in the hands of Thanatos, so that her soul is in excess and can return to the land of the living. The friends celebrate with an almighty feast, and Gryllus dictates his story to Homer, who writes it down for us.

Analysis

Writing about his inspiration for *Pig Scrolls*, Shipton explains that 'I got the idea for this book when I was reading Homer's Odyssey and found myself most interested in some of the non-heroic characters in the background. Working on the book gave me a chance to revisit a world I have always loved – that of ancient mythology and history.' (see here, accessed: 12 October 2018). Gryllus' timidity, gluttonous appetite, and propensity for misadventure make him an unlikely hero, but his unique character gives the text a singular and very funny perspective on this famous story.

Like its prequel, the plot of *The Pig Who Saved the World* is convoluted, interweaving many strands of Greek myth, both from the *Odyssey* and other sources. Though not referred to explicitly, it draws upon Plutarch's *Moralia*, in which Odysseus converses with Gryllus, one of his crew who has been transformed into a pig by Circe. Readers who are already familiar with the traditional version of the story are rewarded with comic asides and in-jokes, as well as the pleasure of seeing some elements of the familiar narrative upheld while others are dismantled. Gryllus returns to Polyphemus' cave, and his friends reenact both the 'Nobody' trick and the means of hiding underneath the sheep, although their attempt to disguise Gryllus as a sheep is quickly exposed. The identity of 'Nobody' in the prophesy is a central element of the adventure that is never fully resolved. Polyphemus refers to Gryllus as Nobody, the head of Orpheus has no body, shapeshifting Proteus could be anybody, and the shade of Sibyl are all suggested as possible interpretations, but as the prophetess herself says, 'It doesn't really matter, does it?' (254). The 'No one' of the second part of the prophesy is interpreted to mean that many people

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played a part in saving the day, celebrating a form of collective heroism that revises the metanarrative of the *Odyssey*, where there is only room for one hero.

There are many postmodern elements within this text.The encounter between Homer and Orpheus, in which Homer awkwardly introduces himself: 'Myself, I'm an epic poet – well, one day I *hope* to be an epic poet, that is – and I'm a huge fan of yours…' (93) is a collision between the worlds of myth and history, rendered comic by Homer's teenage gawkiness and Orpheus' deadpan façade. The representation of Homer as a character within the text has the effect of unsettling the fixed categories of story and storyteller, a process within which Shipton eagerly implicates himself.

The book's paratextual material includes comic endorsements for *The Pig Scrolls* from the Muses, the Minotaur and Alexander the Great, an 'Intermission' page halfway through the book with advertisements for 'Tiresias' All-in-One Entrails Kit' and 'Medusa's Snake Oil Shampoo and Dandruff Treatment.' It concludes with a 'Translator's Note' from 'Paul Shipton, MA, M.Phil, Junior Fire Marshal' describing the discovery of this second batch of 'pig scrolls' in the attic of a Mrs Ethel Prendergast of Leighton Buzzard, whose son Kenny brought them back as a souvenir from a holiday in Crete, and is now threatening to punch Shipton for swindling them.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Circe Homer Labyrinth Midas Odysseus / Ulysses Odyssey Orpheus Polyphemus Proteus Sibyl Sirens Sisyphus Thanatos Tithonus Underworld
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Animals Character traits Death Friendship Good vs evil Heroism Humour Intertextuality Journeys Magic Storytelling Talking animals Transformation
Further Reading	Online review at charlotteslibrary.blogspot.com (accessed: September 2, 2018).

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Author bio and interview (accessed: September 2, 2018).

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