Elizabeth Hale, "Entry on: Pandora’s Box by Lisl Weil ", peer-reviewed by Miriam Riverlea and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/643. Entry version as of November 11, 2026.

Lisl Weil

Pandora’s Box

United States (1986)

TAGS: Epimetheus Hope Pandora Zeus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Pandora’s Box
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1986
First Edition Details	Lisl Weil, *Pandora’s Box*. New York: Atheneum, 1986, 40 pp.
ISBN	9780689312168
Genre	Picture books
Target Audience	Children
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Creators



Lisl Weil , 1910 - 2006
(Author)

Lisl Weil was born in Vienna, Austria. From an early age she liked to draw, and by the age of 16 her illustrations were published in local newspapers. She immigrated to the United States in 1939, being helped by New York connections who helped the young Jewish illustrator come to America. She lived in New York City, where she married Julius Marx. She established a successful career as an illustrator and writer. Her interest in music led her to work with symphony orchestras such as the Boston Pops and the Little Orchestra Society's Young People's Concerts, in which she drew illustrations and danced in response to the music: these "picture ballets" or "ballets with a crayon" toured around the United States. From 1963-1966, she hosted a television show called 'Children's Sketchbook.' Weil illustrated over 100 books for children, for about half of which she wrote the text.

Sources:

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goodreads.com (accessed: January 19, 2019);

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Additional information

Summary

This illustrated retelling of the myth of Pandora begins by explaining that the Greeks believed in many gods, with magical powers, that the 'myths that told about the gods and what they could do gave people reasons why the world is as it is,' and that the story of Pandora was a myth that answered the question 'why couldn't everything always be wonderful for everyone?' (4–5) It then depicts the times of the ancient gods, where 'flowers could talk and magical beasts were everywhere,' where the people lived in fertile valleys and the gods lived above the clouds on Mount Olympus, except when they mingled with the people in disguise, and everyone was happy. (The illustrations show humans, gods, mythical beasts playing in a peaceful landscape.) This continued until, one day, Zeus became angry at human lack of gratitude, and called a council of the gods. Together they decided to make the figure of a girl out of clay and water, giving her the attributes of beauty (from Aphrodite), skill in speech and reasoning (Hermes), love of music (Apollo), and charm and spirit (the three graces). 'And Zeus made her curious.' (16–17). Then Zeus gave her a 'lovely golden box,' telling her she must not open it, but give it to the man she would marry (17). Welcomed among the humans, Pandora married Epimetheus, who was himself curious about the box. Wondering if it was a trick from Zeus, he set out to visit his brother, telling Pandora she must not touch the box. His journey took two days and nights; his brother, worried, advised him immediately to return home and hide the box where it could never be found and opened (23).

Having tidied her new home, and waiting for Epimetheus, Pandora found nothing to do but look at the box. Since the gods had given her so many gifts, she reasoned that surely the box held something wonderful. Opening the box a crack, then a little more, then hearing a slight buzzing, she threw the box open. 'And out came a thick black cloud,' (27) which 'broke up into miserable-looking little winged creatures,' (28–29), which surrounded her then went around the house and out the door, leaving Pandora to close the box, ignoring a shining thing at the bottom of it.

On his way home, Epimetheus was startled to see people fighting instead of dancing. As he got closer to home, he saw more fighting and arguing, and people causing one another pain, and became aware that 'food was not plentiful for everyone' (35). Finding out from Pandora what had happened, Epimetheus, knowing that it could not

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be undone, said 'Zeus has brought this evil on us. And he must have a reason. This is no mere trick. Perhaps we had too many good things to enjoy and did not stop to think how we got them. So now we must live forever in an unhappy world. But it is not your fault, Pandora. Zeus meant it to be' (37). Sadly, Pandora suggests they open the box again, since it was intended by Zeus, to see the shiny thing. Together they open the box, and a beautiful flower comes out of it. Epimetheus realises 'there is hope for us, too.Something good has come with the bad. . . Perhaps this will make us all the more thankful for the good when it comes.' (38)

The story ends with a reflection: 'The bad helps us know what is good. The bitter helps us enjoy the sweet. And dark days make sunny days more pleasant. Through everything there is hope. So when the bad comes, we can hope for the good and know that the bad is not going to last forever.' (40)

Accompanying the story are sepia-toned illustrations, in Weil's characteristically light and humorous style. Opening images of the golden age give way to images of the different gods, to the making of Pandora. The evils of the box are depicted as a black cloud, with sinister figures emerging from it.

Analysis

Pandora's Box is told in a light and warm style, with the emphasis on explaining and thoughtful morality characteristic to Weil's work. Unlike in many versions, Pandora is not to blame – it is Zeus's doing, and he has done so in order to punish humans for their lack of appreciation and responsibility. While Zeus is not depicted as a wise or kindly god, but possesses much of his famous trickery, Epimetheus's rationalisation suggests he is not to blame either. Pandora does not speak for herself: her husband explains things and soothes her, suggesting that the gender divide is not subverted here. The framing of the narrative as an explanation of why the world is not only good, but mixed, has a similarly reassuring tone, suggesting that as a morality tale its aim is to reassure rather than to challenge. Weil's humorous illustrations, especially of the evils of the world, who feature on the cover in funny poses, confirm this effect. A further note: the buzzing, winged insect-like evils seem drawn from Hawthorne's seminal version.

Weil's non-traditional approach, which refuses to assign blame – to

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	Pandora, Epimetheus, or to the gods – is unusually warm and sensitive, suggesting a worldview that encourages optimism and faith in the wisdom of the gods. Perhaps this optimism is a reaction against the horrors of World War II, which Weil narrowly escaped when she moved to the United States; perhaps it is part of a post-war sense of rebuilding and optimism.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Epimetheus Hope Pandora Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Good vs evil

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