Sonya Nevin, "Entry on: The Golden Touch. A Retelling of the Legend of King Midas by Philippe Béha, Glen Huser ", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/697. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

Philippe Béha , Glen Huser

The Golden Touch. A Retelling of the Legend of King Midas

United Kingdom (2015)

TAGS: Apollo Architecture Bible Charybdis Cyclops / Cyclopes Dionysus / Dionysos Faun Gods Greek Music Helen Metamorphoses (Ovid's) Midas Ovid Pan





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

General information	
Title of the work	The Golden Touch. A Retelling of the Legend of King Midas
Country of the First Edition	Canada, United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	Canada; United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2015
First Edition Details	Glen Huser, *The Golden Touch. A Retelling of the Legend of King Midas*. Vancouver, London: Tradewind Books, 2015, 38 pp.
ISBN	9781896580739
Genre	Musicals , Picture books
Target Audience	Children (8+)
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This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Creators



Philippe Béha (Illustrator)

Philippe Béha is a Canadian artist who has been a two-time recipient of the Governor General's Award. His work focuses on the illustration of children's books and has illustrated over 175 books, including *The Golden Touch*, a story of King Midas (2015, Tradewind, see entry in this database).

Bio prepered by Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk



Glen Huser , b. 1943 (Author)

Glen Huser is a Canadian author who writes for children and young adults. He has received awards for his work, including the Governor General's Award and the Mr Christie's Silver Award. For much of his career he was a teacher-librarian before turning to professional writing.

Bio prepared by Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk

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Additional information

Summary

The Golden Touch. A Retelling of the Legend of King Midas is a book and CD version of an opera staged in Canada in which over 200 school children performed alongside a Chroma Musika cast accompanied by The Orchestre Symphonique Pop Montréal, with narration from UK comedian Terry Jones. The opera was composed by Greek national Giannis Georgantelis, and was run as a community project under the auspices of the Government of Canada, the Government of Quebec, and the city of Laval. This was a follow-up to an earlier project (*Time for Flowers, Time for Snow*, see entry in this database) involving the governments of both Canada and Greece. The book version of *The Golden Touch* was published with financial support from the Government of Canada and Canadian Heritage via the Canada Council for the Arts, the Canada Book Fund and Livres Canada Books.

The book is heavily illustrated with images rendered in a highly stylised colourful manner emphasising large eyes and noses. The gods wear classical-style clothing while human characters are depicted in modern attire. Sections of musical score feature within the illustrations of characters connecting the book to the audio. The lyrics of the songs feature in the book and can be experienced in coordination with the CD or read as poems.

The story opens with a song which is written out as a poem and available on the CD set to music. The song is about how tricky wishes are – that sometimes things do not work out as people hoped. This is illustrated by a fisherman bringing up an old boot. The reader/listener is then invited to close their eyes and imagine a time of wonder. Silenus is introduced – a school-master faun who has left work to drink and make merry. Silenus falls asleep in a rose-garden; in the morning King Midas is there. The king sings a song about himself, about how his people often laugh at him because he has donkey ears since placing Apollo second in a music competition. The singing awakens Silenus and the faun and the king greet each other as cousins. King Midas insists that Silenus come into the palace to visit before returning to his master, Dionysus. The queen is annoyed, but their daughter, Princess Zoe, is delighted as Silenus is a great story-teller. That evening, Silenus relates myths about cyclopes, the gorgon Euryale, Helen of Troy, and Charybdis.

After ten days, Apollo appears looking for Silenus. In thanks for taking

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care of him, Dionysus offers Midas a gift – anything he wants. As he knows Dionysus to be a trickster, Midas decides to discuss the matter with his wife first. They sing back and forth, considering options. Midas desires riches, the queen doubts that this will bring them happiness and suggests other options, such as poetical skill, physical beauty for her or him, or the removal of his donkey ears. Midas is unmoved and after seeing his daughter playing a game of it (tag) he determines that his riches should come via the power to transform things to gold with a magical golden touch. Dionysus and Silenus share a knowing look when Midas makes his request. Initially the king is delighted with the results. The queen cries out in horror when she sees Midas transform some fruit; she asks him not to touch her. Midas leaves the palace in distress, then accidentally turns his daughter to gold when she comes to comfort him. The queen rebukes Midas and he flees to a forest. In the forest are fauns searching for Silenus. They stumble upon Midas and hear his tale. They appeal to Dionysus on Midas' behalf, and the king himself begs Dionysus for mercy. The god agrees as he is feeling cheerful. He leads Midas to the River Pactolus where the golden touch is washed away. Dionysus reassures a worried Midas that his daughter has been restored to normal. Back at the palace, the queen tells the daughter, "You were lost, my darling... But now you are home again." Midas is welcomed back. The story ends with a song about how the golden touch of the sun is the real gold to be thankful for.

The sections of the audio-book opera:

- Tricky Wishes
- Imagine (narration)
- The Dance has Just Begun
- in the Garden (narration)
- Rose Garden Ruler
- A Royal Guest (narration)
- Tell us a Story
- Ask Anything (narration)
- Royal Debate
- Eureka (narration)
- Finger Follies
- Zoe's Fate (narration)
- Wanderer in the Woods

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- Fauns in the Forest (narration)
- Search Party
- Picnic
- Any Hope for Midas? (narration)
- Midas, King of Fools
- To the River (narration)
- Queen's Lament
- A Gift Revoked (narration)
- Zoe's Dream
- Return of the King (narration)
- Coming Home
- Still Magic (narration)
- Golden Touch

Analysis

This project was a well-supported means of involving large numbers of people – particularly young people – in learning about and re-creating ancient mythology. The book extends the project by offering a version that can be enjoyed at home or elsewhere following the completion of the main project. The tone of the story is humorous, yet it communicates a serious message about human values.

The story follows the tradition found in Ovid (*Metamorphoses*, 11.95–182). Rather unusually for a modern retelling, this version includes the myth of King Midas' donkey ears. Here it serves to anticipate Midas' misjudgement and to introduce the idea that contact with gods can be dangerous. This is a contrast to its use in *The Metamorphoses* where it follows Midas' golden touch experience and proves that he has learned very little (*Metamorphoses*, 11.183–220). The character of the queen is also an addition to the ancient tradition. She serves to throw Midas' decisions into relief, anticipating problems that may occur and then forgiving him when he returns, chastened. This retelling follows the tradition established by Nathanial Hawthorne (*The Golden Touch*, 1851) in which the king has a daughter whose accidental transformation into gold emphasises and humanises Midas' mistake. Hawthorne's princess is called "Marygold", while Huser's is "Zoe", but the character's function within the story is the same. "Marygold" is an appropriate name in containing "gold". "Zoe" is appropriate in a different way; the name meaning "life" in Greek, with the threat to her life bringing Midas to his senses. There is a biblical echo of the myth of the Prodigal Son (*Luke*, 15.11–32: 'he who was dead is alive again; he was lost and is found') when the

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queen tells her daughter, "You were lost, my darling… But now you are home again", and when Midas is welcomed back. This reemphasises the myth's redemption theme (Midas learning to be a better person), a feature which Ovid had undermined.

The choice of Silenus' tales is interesting. Euryale, for example, is not the most famous gorgon, but here it is she, not Medusa, who is celebrated in song. The inclusion of the Trojan War implies that the events of the Midas myth took place *after* the war, which is an unusual if admissible idea (perhaps included to express the "Greekness" of the myths to participating children). The image of the story-telling guest is a very ancient Greek trope used to good effect here to vary the storytelling and to evoke a world of wonders. Similarly, the fauns are illustrated playfully and with humour as fun and raucous beings. The fauns are, however, fauns rather than satyrs (i.e they have hairy rather than naked lower-halves), and the fun that they are shown engaging in is of a non-sexual nature. This, and the re-casting of Silenus – libertine father of satyrs – as a school-master, tones down the more bawdy elements of the ancient traditions about Silenus and his companions, making it more likely to be acceptable to the schools involved in the original project and to those buying the book for young children. Closing on a tribute to the blessings of the sun is an effective way to reinforce the central moral of the story, namely that there are more important things to be grateful for than material wealth, not only family, but the natural world.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Apollo Architecture Bible Charybdis Cyclops / Cyclopes Dionysus / Dionysos Faun Gods Greek Music Helen Metamorphoses (Ovid's) Midas Ovid Pan
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Character traits Child, children Emotions Environment Family Gaining understanding Judgement Magic powers Morality Parents (and children) Storytelling Values

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Further Reading

Griffiths, Alan H., "Midas", *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949: rev third edition, 2003, 978.

Roberts, Deborah H., "The Metamorphosis of Ovid in Retellings of Myth for Children", in Lisa Maurice, ed., *The Reception of Ancient Greece and Rome in Children's Literature. Heroes and Eagles*, Leiden: Brill, 2015.

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