Elizabeth Hale, "Entry on: City Mouse, Country Mouse by Maggie Rudy", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Susan Deacy. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/711. Entry version as of November 15, 2026.

Maggie Rudy

City Mouse, Country Mouse

United States of America (2017)

TAGS: Aesop's Fables Horace





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

General information	
Title of the work	City Mouse, Country Mouse
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2017
First Edition Details	Maggie Rudy, *City Mouse, Country Mouse*. New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2017, 40 pp.
ISBN	9781627796163
Official Website	maggierudy.com (accessed: March 19, 2019)
Genre	Picture books
Target Audience	Children
Author of the Entry	Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au
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Creators



Maggie Rudy (Author, Illustrator)

Maggie Rudy is an artist and illustrator who grew up in the UK, and now lives in Portland, Oregon, with her husband and dog. She has two sons who are also artists. When her children were small, she made mice out of felt in imitation of some toy mice she had as a child. She has created a world for them, using found objects and felting material, and has created several picture books, featuring them: *The House that Mouse Built* (2011), I *wish I Had a Pet* (2014), and *City Mouse, Country Mouse* (2017)

Sources:

Official website (accessed: March 19, 2019)

And Finally, the Miniature Mouse Village of Your Dreams at at messynessychic.com (accessed: March 19, 2019)

Interview at andreaskyberg.com (accessed: March 19, 2019)

Bio prepared by Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

Questionnaire

1. What drew you to working with mice, felt, and found objects in your work? How did you develop your particular artistic style/idiom/aesthetic for your works inspired by Classical Antiquity? (These are overlapping questions, so feel free to answer them as one)

I had a couple of much loved felt mice, purchased in an English toy shop when I was a child. About 25 years ago, with young children of

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my own, I took a pattern from those old survivors and began to make my own versions. Then the mice needed somewhere to live, and the whole thing got out of hand.

I had been working for years as a fine artist, showing paintings and drawings in gallery shows, as well as other artistic pursuits like puppet-making, costume design, woodworking and jewelry fabrication. Building Mouseland allows me to experiment with all sorts of techniques and materials, and my work day may include sewing, photo editing, book design, pattern drafting, soldering, painting, sculpting, photographing, dyeing or wood working. I like to use as many scavenged and recycled ingredients as I can, which satisfies my need for a challenge as well as being a legacy of thrift passed down from parents who grew up in wartime.

The mice have now evolved so much as to be unrecognizable to their English ancestors, and have been joined in Mouseland by squirrels, frogs, birds, and other wild creatures. In 2011 I began photographing characters and scenes to illustrate picture books; *City Mouse, Country Mouse* is my third book.

2. I suspect the answer is obvious, but why did you draw on Aesop in *City Mouse, Country Mouse*? How concerned were you with "accuracy" or "fidelity" to the original? (another way of saying that might be—that I think writers are often more "faithful" to originals in adapting its spirit rather than being tied down at the level of detail—is this something you thought about?)--I really like how you resolve the underpinning conflict between the two mice--was that something you wanted to do from the outset, or did it come to you?

The idea of making *CMCM* was not mine, originally. It was suggested to me by an editor, who thought my illustrations would be a good fit. I was reluctant to undertake it at first, because it had been retold so many times, and it's a challenge to bring something new to such a familiar tale.

There is a moral in Aesop's version of *The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse* that can be summed up as "be content with your lot, for the unfamiliar is dangerous", which I thought was a rather fearful message for young children, who need be encouraged to explore the

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unknown and expand their horizons. I decided to focus instead on the friendship between the two mice and and how they learn to compromise so that they can be together. I took Aesop's original appealing concept of the conflict of opposites-city and country-but gave it a happier resolution.

The story has some resonance for me personally as well, as I am something of a country mouse and my husband grew up in the city.

3. Why do you think classical / ancient myths, history, and literature continue to resonate with young audiences?

I suppose they represent universal truths about people, boiled down into recognizable themes and types. Books of mythology are like field guides to human behavior.

4. Do you have a background in classical education (Latin or Greek at school or classes at the University?) What sources are you using? Scholarly work? Wikipedia? Are there any books that made an impact on you in this respect?

I don't have a classical education, although my university (Reed College) had a strong emphasis on the classics and we spent several semesters on the Odyssey and the Illiad, as well as other ancient Greek works. My grandmother taught Greek and Latin, and used to have books in those languages on her bedside table. My sisters and I also had a childhood book we were obsessed with (Tales of the Greeks & Trojans, Roger Lancelyn Green) that had fabulous illustrations and that gave us both a lifelong interest in Greek mythology. I use Wikidedia and *Bulfinch's Mythology* as references.

5. Are you planning any further forays into classical material?

My forthcoming book is a retelling of Cinderella, which I read first appeared in Greek as the tale of Rhodopis, whose shoe is stolen by an eagle and dropped into the lap of a king!

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Additional information

Summary

In this retelling of the famous fable of Aesop, Tansy mouse (a country mouse) makes friends with William Mouse (a city mouse) when she mistakes the end of his tail for a fuzzy grey caterpillar in her strawberry patch. Over a meal of strawberries, William tells Tansy about the excitement of the city. Tansy tells him the country is better and shows him her world. "Just *smell* the freshness!" (p. 6). As the sun gets low, Will says he must be going, and he invites Tansy to come with him. "It'll be an adventure." (p. 9) Will shows Tansy the many sights of the city – the buildings, the streets, the parks, and the cafes, and while the two friends plan their next adventures, Tansy is homesick. "She missed the song of the cricket and the sweet grassy scent of the meadow." Telling Will the city is too crowded and noisy, she prepares to go home. Will tells her that the country is too quiet for him, but she packs her bag and leaves. (p. 18) At home, Tansy loves the country, but "nothing seemed quite as wonderful without Will"; alone in the city, "Will missed his friend." (p. 20) As the days pass and summer slips into autumn, the friends miss one another. Will decides "I'll just go visit for a day." (p. 23), and he sets off – halfway there, he meets Tansy coming to find him (p. 25). The two friends "walked arm in arm through the little one-street town," (p. 26) and go to a café, where they decide to stay in the halfway town, "not quite the country and not quite the city." (p. 28), and where they can both visit the city or the country as the need takes them. "And Tansy and Will, the best of friends, lived mousily ever after" (p. 32).

Analysis

This gentle retelling of Aesop's fable emphasizes the compromises friends make to enjoy one another's company. It celebrates both the perspectives of the city mouse and the country mouse – the joys of nature and the countryside, and the excitement and activity of the city. Using simple language, and emphasizing a warm friendship between Will and Tansy, the story has a happy ending, in which the mice compromise by moving into a small village, between the city and the country.

Dominating the story are the magnificent images, photographed scenes of Will and Tansy, the felt mice, set in carefully composed settings made of found objects. The animals are all clothed, emphasizing an anthropomorphic approach to the story. The

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	perspective in the countryside is highly realistic: the mice are posed amongst grasses and plants, which tower over them. The cityscape is meticulously built, showing mice performing a range of daily activities which would be appealing to children. The images of Will and Tansy's world are bathed in warm light (golden in the countryside, pinky-purple in the city), emphasizing a positive, safe approach.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aesop's Fables Horace
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Animals Friendship Nature
Further Reading	Cosslett, Tess, "Child's Place in Nature: Talking Animals in Victorian Fiction", *Nineteenth-Century Contexts: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 23.4 (2000): 475–495. Hale, Elizabeth, "Reading Animals in Margaret Mahy's Poems, Picture Books and Stories for Younger Readers", *The Lion and the Unicorn* 39.2 (2015): 186–203. Hall, Edith, "Aesop the Morphing Fabulist", in Owen Hodkinson and Helen Lovatt, eds., *Classical Reception and Children's Literature: Greece, Rome and Childhood Transformation*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2018, 89–107.

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