Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: What's in the Box, Pandora? (Ancient Myths for Kids, 1) by Mary Helen Beckwith, Regina Price", 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/916. Entry version as of October 31, 2026.

Mary Helen Beckwith , Regina Price

What's in the Box, Pandora? (Ancient Myths for Kids, 1)

United KIngdom (2014)

TAGS: Epimetheus Mercury Pandora





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

General information	
Title of the work	What's in the Box, Pandora? (Ancient Myths for Kids, 1)
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
First Edition Date	2014
First Edition Details	Mary Helen Beckwith and Regina Price, *What's in the Box, Pandora?* (Ancient Myths for Kids, Book 1). The Press at Thornton Field (Kindle Edition), 2014, 12 pp.
ISBN	ASIN: B00JPRUDI8
Genre	Adaptations, Myths
Target Audience	Children (Young Children, 4–7)
Author of the Entry	Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com
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Creators



Mary Helen Beckwith (Author)

Mary Helen Beckwith was an author of educational texts for children: *When First We Go to School*, *In Mythland* (1896) and *Lesson Plans: Domestic Animals* (c. 1907). The dedication and preface to *In Mythland* suggests she may have been a kindergarten teacher herself. The words 'Florence Kindergarten' appear beneath her name at the end of the preface; this may mean that she lived and taught in Florence, Massachusetts, an area where her illustrator Susanne Lathrop was also active.

Sources:

ThriftBook (accessed: August 2, 2022).

The Online Books Page (accessed: August 2, 2022).

Bio prepared by Robin Diver, University of Birmingham, robin.diver@hotmail.com



Regina Price (Author)

Regina Price slightly updated the language of the original anthology but maintained the old-fashioned feel of the myth and illustrations. She notes that she has always loved books. Her wish is to "make the old stories available to a new generation of parents and children." (see here, accessed: November 26, 2019).

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Source:

Official website (accessed: November 26, 2019).

Bio prepared by Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com

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Additional information

Summary

This rendition of the myth is written in short lines, almost like poetry. It narrates the story of Pandora and Epimetheus as little children. The girl Pandora is interested in a mysterious wooden box she saw at Epimetheus' house. He tells her that what is inside the box and who gave it to him are a secret. Finally, after she keeps asking, he tells her the box was brought by a man with wings on his cap; Pandora guesses he is Mercury since he also brought her to where she currently lives and therefore she concludes that the box is meant for her. Pandora starts opening the box and Epimetheus wishes to see what is inside as well. Then bees come out and sting the children. In the end they hear a voice from the box, which comes from something which resembles a butterfly. She says her name is Hope and she can help them and so she makes them feel better.

The story is accompanied with small black and white drawings.

Analysis

In the introduction, the modern adapter Regina Price, explains that "catching the attention of children with the old stories may well lead them to continue reading more and more complex material on their own, simply because they already know the characters!" This is the premise of many similar adaptations of myth, which aim to attract young readers with adapted versions in order to develop in young readers the natural curiosity and interest in the ancient myth. A similar approach appears in Diane Buttress' rendition of *Theseus and the Minotaur* (2013).

The purpose of this volume is hence two-fold: to familiarize the young audience with the ancient myth, and also to preserve the original works of Mary Helen Beckwith. It is a double reception, first of the Greek myths, and then of their retelling, which is also considered literature worth saving on its own merit. Every author brings his/her own conceptions, beliefs and values to the ancient myth and therefore the stories which come down to us, even if they share similar roots, all branch out in different directions. In this story, the author focuses on small children, who live alone and their interactions.

The story of Pandora's box has had countless renditions. Its educational and moral message especially appeals to children's

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authors. In this book, in order to make the story more approachable to the young readers, the main characters are also young. We have already encountered young Pandoras in other books, for example 12 year old Pandora in the Goddess Girls series by Joan Holub and Suzanne Williams or a teenage modern Pandora in Richard Clark's *Pandora's Lunch Box: Don't Open!* (2017) and also younger Pandoras, for example in *Be Patient, Pandora!* (Mini Myths) by Joan Holub (2014).

Yet in this retelling, everyone is a little child in a world without adults, or gods (Mercury's name is mentioned yet not explained) as if all these children live in their own little fairy tale, eating only fruits. It is emphasized that Epimetheus does not have any father or mother and that he lives on his own in a little house (perhaps a fairy tale reference? A little boy lives in a little house somewhere unknown), yet other children had brothers and sisters. There is no discussion about Epimetheus' apparent orphanhood. The emphasis on him being alone is meant to illustrate his strong bond with Pandora, the girl with whom he plays and lives. Interestingly, while describing their daily life, the author states that Pandora did not cook. If we recall that the initial version of Mary Helen Beckwith appeared during the 1890s, we may wonder what were the author's thoughts when she wrote this note.

As Lisa Maurice notes, the above part is clearly influenced by Nathanial Hawthorne's retelling in *A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys* (1851).

Epimetheus does not like Pandora's repeated questions about the box, so he leaves her, yet he finds that life is meaningless without her. The author depicts young love here in a way that is not always emphasized even in other renditions. The author chose to let bees fly out of the box. It is an intriguing literary decision. Are bees meant to be bad creatures? What do they symbolize? Hope appears like a butterfly and can talk, and she makes them feel better. Yet the appearance of bees is puzzling. In other stories the evils in the box are also likened to bugs which sting and bite (for example, in Sally Grindley's *Pandora and The Mystery Box*, 2000, the evils appear like big mosquitos yet are not specifically defined). The young readers will need some explaining pertaining the existence of bees in the box.

Again we witness here the influence of Hawthorne, and as Lisa Maurice notes, Miriam Riverlea highlights the connection with Hesiod

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	as well. To conclude, this book is aimed for young children and is meant to be as simplified as possible. The word curiosity does not appear at all, and the children perhaps need to discuss with their parents or teachers the moral of the story.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Epimetheus Mercury Pandora
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Conflict Emotions Friendship
Further Reading	Riverlea, Miriam, “Out of the Box: Refashioning Pandora in Children’s Literature” in Jessica L. Wilkinson, Eric Parisot and David McInnis, eds., *Refashioning Myth: Poetic Transformations and Metamorphoses*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011, 259–278.

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