Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: King Midas by Kathleen Olmstead, Maurizio Quarello", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Susan Deacy. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/949. Entry version as of November 01, 2026.

Kathleen Olmstead , Maurizio Quarello

King Midas

United States of America (2014)

TAGS: Dionysus / Dionysos Golden Touch Midas





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

General information	
Title of the work	King Midas
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States of America, United Kingdom, Canada
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2014
First Edition Details	Kathleen Olmstead, *King Midas*, "Silver Penny Stories". New York: Sterling Children's Books, 2014, 41 pp.
ISBN	9781402783463
Genre	Adaptations, Myths, Picture books
Target Audience	Children (3–6 years)
Author of the Entry	Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Lisa Maurice, Bar-Ilan University, lisa.maurice@biu.ac.il Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk

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Creators



Kathleen Olmstead (Author)

Kathleen Olmstead has written a variety of children's books, including several for the "Classic Starts" series, including *The Iliad*, *Oliver Twist*, *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, *Polyanna*, *Moby Dick*, and *The Voyages of Doctor Dolittle*. Olmstead has also written for the "Untold History of Television" series covering critically acclaimed television shows such as *Mad Men*, *Breaking Bad*, and *The Wire*.

Source:

Profile at goodreads.com (accessed: February 4, 2020).

Bio prepared by Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com and Constantine Christoforou, University of Roehampton, christoc1@roehampton.ac.uk



Photo courtesy of Maurizio Quarello.

Maurizio Quarello , b. 1974 (Illustrator)

Maurizio Quarello is an Italian illustrator. He was born in Turin, Italy, where he also studied graphic design, architecture and illustration. His picture book *Babau cerca casa* (2005) was awarded in Italy with Primo Voto as the best picture book of the year. His books have received numerous awards in Italy, France, Spain, Belgium, Sweden and in Germany. Since 2007, he has run illustration courses and workshops for children and adults and, in 2011 he began working as an illustration teacher at the Academy of Fine Arts in Macerata. (From the illustrator’s website).

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Source:

Official website (accessed: February 4, 2020).

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Additional information

Summary

The book follows the myth of King Midas' golden touch with page-long illustrations. The story is aimed at young children.

Analysis

King Midas as presented in the book is an intriguing character. Not much is known about the Phrygian king, and the two myths concerning him (the golden touch and the donkey ears) fit comfortably within the framework of moral tales. Our earliest mention of Midas is in Herodotus' *Histories*, in which he is named as the son of Gordias. Midas' myths suit the educational purposes of myths for children, especially the golden touch. The popularity of this myth for children is also attested by its adaptation to other media, for example, Walt Disney *Silly Symphony* cartoon from 1935, *The Golden Touch*, which was directed by Walt Disney himself (although he was severely disappointed with the final result, see *When Walt Laid a Golden Egg* by Jim Korkis, accessed: February 4, 2020).

In the cartoon the golden touch is granted by a leprechaun. A humorous adaptation of the myth also appears on the Muppet Classic Theater from 1994 (accessed: February 4, 2020). In this sketch, the golden touch is granted by a Satyr, and Queen Midas (Miss Piggy) is the character linked with avarice.

The theme of the myth, avarice, is well fitted to modern values, especially in a capitalist world. The King is not satisfied with his riches and only wants more, until he loses what is most precious: family, friends and even basic nourishment. Since this is a story or children, the most dramatic moment is when Midas accidentally turns his daughter to gold, and he greatly misses her afterwards, asking to break the wish that has turned into a curse.

The author also mentions that the god Dionysus is the one who grants Midas' wish as a reward for his fair treatment of an old servant. The author does not disclose that the old man was Dionysus' servant and Midas simply allows him to sleep in his garden. Thus the impression of Dionysus that is presented here is that he is a benevolent god who rewards good deeds, which is quite removed from Dionysus' usual characteristics in the myths (for example as he is presented in Euripides' *Bacchae*).

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	The addition of Midas' daughter turning to gold is probably due to later influence (perhaps Hawthorne), as it is not part of the original myth as it appears in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. This addition appears in other adaptations of myths for children, for example in the comic *Amazing Greek Myths of Wonder and Blunders* by Michael Townsend also from 2014. Perhaps the authors feel that the young readership of these stories will be more moved by the addition of a child turned into gold, whereas the ancient sources only discuss Midas' hunger as the crucial reason for his wish to abolish the golden touch. Another possible explanation is Nathaniel Hawthornes' strong influence on later myth adaptations.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Dionysus / Dionysos Golden Touch Midas
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Family Good deeds Magic powers
Further Reading	Seaford, Richard, *Dionysos (Gods and Heroes of the Ancient World)*, Routledge, 2006.

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