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A WONDER BOOK FOR GIRLS & BOYS (non Illustrated)



Synopsis

A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys (1852) is a children's book written by American author Nathaniel Hawthorne in which he rewrites myths from Greek mythology. It was followed by a sequel, Tanglewood Tales for Boys and Girls. The stories are all stories within a story, the frame story being that a Williams College student, Eustace Bright, is telling these tales to a group of children at Tanglewood, an estate in Lenox, Massachusetts, where Hawthorne lived for a time. A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys covers the myths of * The Gorgon's Head * The Golden Touch * The Paradise of Children * The Three Golden Apples * The Miraculous Pitcher * The Chimæra

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Once upon a time (I was about 8), a family friend handed down his Collier's Junior Classic series to me - each volume is a glorious hodgepodge of short stories from here, there, and everywhere. I got to be very fond of Greek mythology, especially "The Chimaera" and "The Miraculous Pitcher", since the Collier retellings of their respective legends were much more lively than the ordinary. Alas, I forgot the name of the author of "The Chimaera", and even that my favourite versions of the myths were all written by the same person. Some talented guy writing for the series, no doubt, I would

have said, if I'd thought about it. A couple of years ago, I started browsing through an impressive-looking illustrated volume of mythology in a bookstore (which you now see before you). Whoa. "Scarlet Letter" Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote *THESE*? His retellings of Greek myths were originally spread over 2 volumes (the other being Tanglewood Tales), but they can be obtained in a single volume these days. I can personally do without the gang of Tanglewood kids providing the official audience for the stories-within-a-story, or the defense against critics put into the mouth of the storyteller Eustace Bright, but then I want more space for more myths. :) Each myth in A Wonder Book has an Introductory and After the Story section where the storyteller leads up to the tale, then fends off any awkward questions from his young audience. "The Gorgon's Head" - The story of Perseus, from his infancy through the quest for Medusa's head.

In the spring of 1851 Hawthorne wrote to his publisher, James Fields (of the renowned Ticknor and Fields), proposing a children's book retelling six well-known stories from Greek mythology. He planned to adopt "a tone in some degree Gothic or romantic." In addition, he wanted to make the fables suitable for young Christian children: "of course, I shall purge all the old heathen wickedness, and put in a moral wherever practicable." I am usually not a fan of sanitized tales--even when written by someone the status of Nathaniel Hawthorne. But, in spite of their overt preachiness and their occasional preciousness, there's something charming and original about these adaptations. Even adults might enjoy these six tales: Perseus's slaughter of Medusa, Midas and his golden touch, Pandora's box (stripped of Prometheus's role), the apples of the Hesperides (or Hercules's Eleventh Labor), Baucis and Philemon and the magic pitcher (which, in my opinion, is the best of the lot), and Bellerophon and Pegasus's battle with the monster Chimaera. Threading these stories together is Eustace Bright, Hawthorne's college-age narrator, who relates his versions to a gaggle of local children (a couple of whom taunt him for his bumptiousness). Hawthorne uses this framing device to insert himself as his own critic. Overhearing one of the stories, the father of one of the children is not amused, finding Eustace's taste "altogether Gothic" and advising him "never more to meddle with a classical myth." To this critique, Eustace petulantly responds that "an old Greek had no more right to them, than a modern Yankee has," and he accuses classical writers of forming these tales "into shapes of indestructible beauty, indeed, but cold and heartless."

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