

Travels, Treasures, and the *Locus Terribilis*: Myth in Children's Media

It is a well-known adage that in order to properly understand English literature a person needs a thorough understanding of three things: the works of Shakespeare, the Bible, and Greek mythology. True or not, Greek myth has remained so deeply ingrained in our collective cultural consciousness that it has become part of the canon of children's folklore, second only to fairy tales in its pervasiveness. Mythology is so much a part of contemporary children's culture that it has moved beyond basic cultural literacy and become a vehicle to shape the character of today's youth.

Beginning with Nathaniel Hawthorne's *A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys*, it has become customary to use myth as a way to teach young children moral, character-building lessons (Miller 345). Like fairy tales, the focus of myth shifted so that cautionary stories became lessons in humility, virtue, and obedience. Today, the lessons have expanded to encompass character growth, teaching children to be their best selves through myth. As a result, Odysseus' travels teach children to overcome personal fears, mythical monsters instill empathy for those who are different, and Midas' greed demonstrates the benefits of moderation. This panel will explore a few of the ways that the producers of children's media use ancient mythology to influence children's moral and psychological development.

The panel will examine the topic in a number of different media, including television, illustrated books, and multimedia collections. One paper will consider the mixed message sent in Dugald Steer's *Mythology* through the combination of a frame story about the dangers of obsession with material culture with the book's appealing collection of interactive elements. Another paper will demonstrate that the natural world as depicted in d'Aulaires' *Book of Greek Myths* borrows a sense of agency from fairy tale landscapes. A third paper will discuss

depictions of the wanderings of Odysseus as manifestations of journeys of spiritual growth for young protagonists in American children's television, using an episode of *Martha Speaks*, "Truman and the Deep Blue Sea," as a case study. A final paper will evaluate the methods used to make mythical half-human creatures accessible to young audiences.

Bibliography

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