

Fairy-Tale Landscapes in the d'Aulaires' *Book of Greek Myths* (1962)

Fifty-five years after its publication, Ingri and Edgar d'Aulaire's *Book of Greek Myths* (New York: Doubleday, 1962) remains so popular that Amazon ranks the volume among its top 1,000 current bestsellers of *all* books, not just those for children (data captured August 9, 2017). Anecdotal evidence suggests that numerous classicists first encountered mythology in this compendium (e.g., Gregory Hays: Donahue 2002). Still, despite its reach and influence, the book has only once been the exclusive subject of a classical reception study (Poe and Hawkins 2010). Much work remains to be done on the interpretations of antiquity in the d'Aulaires' illustrations and text.

The present paper specifically considers the ways that the d'Aulaires' lithographs present the natural and mythical environment, the surroundings of mortals and gods. Building on the descriptive language of their prose, the d'Aulaires afford great prominence in their images to animals, monsters, vegetation, rock formations, bodies of water, and meteorological phenomena. Familiar or fantastical beasts often occupy the immediate foreground or the center of a composition, sometimes rendered on a larger scale than the human and divine figures in the same scene. Creatures of all types are dynamic and highly expressive; even plants, trees, and rocks seem to swell, writhe, or bite; rivers, seas, and clouds undulate or churn. These entities can yield comfort or aid to mortals and deities, or they can pose profound threats, or they can exist independently: Like heroes and gods, the landscape is powerful and has its own stories.

The d'Aulaires' illustrations differ markedly in this regard from most classical mythological scenes. The pair's black-and-white lithograph of Heracles and Cerberus, for example, places the enormous hound between the viewer and the struggling hero, who crouches off-balance, receding into shadow; the monster's claws dig into serrated ground, and its twisting heads are full

of strain and pathos, one gazing wide-eyed at the reader (143). In the many known Greek and Roman images, by contrast, Heracles is already in control, petting Cerberus or holding it on a lead, and while the monster may be either ferocious or subdued, it does not solicit the viewer's sympathy (e.g., on Attic vases, including Toledo 1950.261, Pushkin II 1b70, MFA 01.8025; on the mid-second-century Velletri Sarcophagus; and in the third-century Twelve Labors pavement mosaic from Lliria). Some scenes in the *Book of Greek Myths* lack ancient visual precedents altogether, including Echidna nursing her offspring (18) and Tithonus transformed into a grasshopper (81).

The illustrations in older children's myth books sometime devote significant attention to monsters and landscapes, such as those produced by Maxfield Parrish in 1910 and Arthur Rackham in 1922 for editions of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys* and *Tanglewood Tales*. The influence of these works on the d'Aulaires was probably limited, however. A number of the couple's earlier books, including *Ola* (Doubleday, 1932), *Leif the Lucky* (Doubleday, 1941), and *Pocahontas* (1946), already display a profusion of flora and fauna; it was a trait of the d'Aulaires' artistic style generally. The hand-drawn quality of the d'Aulaires' lithographs, moreover, and the pair's willingness to distort scale and perspective for dramatic effect (Bader 1976, 42), imbue the creatures and settings in the *Book of Greek Myths* with an unparalleled liveliness and immediacy.

The d'Aulaires employed this style again in *Norse Gods and Giants* (Doubleday, 1967) and *Trolls* (Doubleday, 1972), portraying hirsute giants and trolls roving rocky and forested terrain teeming with wildlife. The illustrations of those books vividly capture the fairy-tale quality of Norse myth and folklore, well-known to the d'Aulaires through Ingri's upbringing and artistic training in Norway (Hoyle 1999, 265-6). In the *Book of Greek Myths*, the present paper argues,

the same fairy-tale ambiance is already present, only within a classical context. Rather than focusing on the humanistic dimension of classical mythology, as Greek and Roman art typically does, the d'Aulaires' illustrations emphatically situate the protagonists of myth within a world full of animate beings and natural forces that possess their own considerable agency.

Bibliography

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