

OUR MYTHICAL CHILDHOOD

# OUR MYTHICAL HOPE

The Ancient Myths  
as Medicine for the Hardships  
of Life in Children's  
and Young Adults' Culture

Edited by  
Katarzyna Marciniak



# OUR MYTHICAL HOPE

“OUR MYTHICAL CHILDHOOD” Series

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## The Ancient Myths as Medicine for the Hardships of Life in Children's and Young Adults' Culture

Edited by Katarzyna Marciniak



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PART III

Holding Out for a Hero...  
and a Heroine



## LA FONTAINE'S REEDS: ADAPTING GREEK MYTHICAL HEROINES TO MODEL RESILIENCE

In the year 1668, the French poet Jean de La Fontaine published the first six books of his adaptation of Aesop's fables. The collection was dedicated to the young Dauphin, the six-year-old son of Louis XIV. The first book included La Fontaine's version of "The Oak and the Reed", fable 70 in the Perry Index. La Fontaine emphasized that the reed's flexibility allowed it to adapt and survive in a storm, contrasted with the oak's brittle strength, which failed, killing the tree. Although La Fontaine's moral is commonly recognized today, it is not the universal ancient moral. The point of the fable as preserved in Avianus is to teach that open resistance is less successful than incremental change, and Babrius suggests that one should yield to the dictates of the strong, not oppose them.<sup>1</sup> La Fontaine decided on an adaptation to suit the needs of seventeenth-century France. His reeds reflect this choice in two ways. They themselves adapt to new, dangerous circumstances, the storm, and as a result are able to survive. They are also the product of their author's adaptation for his audience, primarily the French monarchy and nobility, to suggest that they should be prepared to change their lifestyles in response to new Enlightenment thought.

Both kinds of adaptation, that of the reeds to the storm and that of the author to his or her audience, are applicable to modern retellings of myth that focus primarily on female characters. Most women of myth fare poorly in their original narratives, but new versions can present them as survivors rather than victims. Like La Fontaine's reeds, such heroines often find themselves trapped by their mythical narratives in adverse situations and must develop coping skills in order to survive. These coping mechanisms are not limited to the preservation of their physical persons, but must extend to their psychological well-being. Such narrative adaptations make for intriguing characters and they can serve

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<sup>1</sup> Avianus, *Fables* 16.19–20; Babrius, *Fables* 36.13–14.

a didactic function as well. They teach children, particularly young women and girls, how to weather their own psychological storms and survive with a minimum of damage, to bend rather than to break.

## Why Mythical Heroines?

Mythical women are particularly suited for such didactic work. There is no authoritative study on the age at which most children are exposed to Greek mythology in the United States. However, the wealth of popular material inspired by Greek myth aimed at children between the ages of seven and ten suggests that this age range is a lucrative market for mythically themed products. The most respected myth collection for children, *D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths* (1962), is marketed by its publisher as appropriate for children aged eight to twelve.<sup>2</sup>

Works of popular fiction based on Greek mythology are aimed at readers in a similar age range. For example, Disney Publishing Worldwide, which owns the publication rights to Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series (2005–2009), lists the first book of the series as appropriate for readers between the ages nine and twelve.<sup>3</sup> Common Sense Media, a San Francisco-based non-profit dedicated to analyses of children's media with a user base of circa 65 million people, recommends Disney's film *Hercules* for ages seven and older.<sup>4</sup>

Mythology is likewise a part of the US public school curriculum for children between the ages of seven to nine. Although the Common Core standards are highly controversial in the United States, it is worth noting that mythology, fables, and folklore are covered in the 3rd grade (ages eight to nine) in the Common Core State Standards Initiative Curriculum.<sup>5</sup> Not all states follow the Common Core, but many curricula are based on the system. Both the New York State Common Core Curriculum and Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)

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<sup>2</sup> Vendor website for Ingri d'Aulaire and Edgar Parin d'Aulaire, *D'Aulaires Book of Greek Myths*, New York, NY: Penguin Random House, 1992 (ed. pr. 1962), <http://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/36027/daulaires-book-of-greek-myths-by-ingri-daulaire-and-edgar-parin-daulaire/9780440406945/> (accessed 19 August 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Vendor website for Rick Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, vol. 1: *The Lightning Thief*, Burbank, CA: Disney Publishing Worldwide, 2005, <http://books.disney.com/book/lightning-thief-the/> (accessed 19 August 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Nell Minow, "Hercules: Movie Review", Common Sense Media, <https://www.common Sense Media.org/movie-reviews/hercules#> (accessed 4 August 2019).

<sup>5</sup> "English Language Arts Standards » Reading: Literature » Grade 3", Common Core State Standards Initiative, <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/3/> (accessed 19 August 2017).



teach Greek mythology specifically in the 2nd grade, ages seven to eight.<sup>6</sup> The largest public school system in the US is in the state of California, but the California Common Core State Standards do not dictate when mythology should be taught. However, students are required to recognize mythology-based vocabulary (such as the word "Herculean") by Grade 4 (ages nine to ten).<sup>7</sup> Taking the evidence of the marketing of popular mythology-based products and the national and state curricula into account, it is reasonable to presume that a large percent of US children are familiar with the more widespread, mainstream stories of ancient mythology.<sup>8</sup>

Mythology is familiar to children between the ages of eight and twelve, so it is appealing to young readers. At the same time, myths are far enough removed from real life that there is minimal risk of retraumatizing children and teens who might already be suffering under adverse conditions. Popular works of children's mythology often take on aspects of fairy tales in their retelling, setting them firmly in the realm of fantasy.<sup>9</sup> Due to the fantastic qualities of the stories and the geographic and temporal remoteness of their context, readers can identify with characters without seeing their own lived experience directly reflected in the stories' events.

Finally, the very exceptionalism of the characters makes them useful for the purpose of modelling resilience in adverse circumstances beyond their own control. This statement directly contradicts the argument of Bruno Bettelheim

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<sup>6</sup> "Grade 2 ELA Domain 4: Greek Myths", EngageNY, New York State Education Department, 2017, [www.engageny.org/resource/grade-2-ela-domain-4-greek-myths](http://www.engageny.org/resource/grade-2-ela-domain-4-greek-myths) (accessed 19 August 2017); "§110.13. English Language Arts and Reading, Grade 2, Beginning with School Year 2009–2010", in *Chapter 110: Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for English Language Arts and Reading Subchapter A. Elementary*, b.2.6.A–B, <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter110/ch110a.html> (accessed 20 August 2017). The TEKS were adopted in 2007 and have been revised several times since, most recently in June of 2017 for the 2017/18 school year; see also "TEKS Review and Revision", Texas Educational Agency, <http://tea.texas.gov/index2.aspx?id=25769817636> (accessed 20 August 2017).

<sup>7</sup> "Reading Standards for Literature K–5", in *California Common Core State Standards English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects*, Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education, 2013, 13, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/documents/finalesccssstandards.pdf> (accessed 19 August 2017).

<sup>8</sup> On mythology in education, see Lisa Maurice, ed., *Our Mythical Education: The Reception of Classical Myth Worldwide in Formal Education, 1900–2020*, "Our Mythical Childhood", Warsaw: Warsaw University Press, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Alison Poe, "Fairy-Tale Landscapes in the d'Aulaires *Book of Greek Myths* (1962)", The Classical Association of the Middle West and South (CAMWS), lecture given at the 14th Annual CAMWS Meeting at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM, 11–14 April 2018, <https://camws.org/sites/default/files/meeting2018/panels/ChildrenMedia.02.pdf> (accessed 2 May 2020).

in his landmark book, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. It should be observed, however, that his focus was on fairy tales and as such he did not fully consider the opportunities that mythology offers.<sup>10</sup> Bettelheim suggests that myths are unsuitable vehicles for childhood development because of the exceptionalism of the characters and events, but he does not consider the possibilities of adaptation and multiformity, as well as the presence of myth in the modern popular culture.

It is true that the characters of myth are often super-powered demigods and members of royal families, but modern comic-book superheroes with dual identities as heroes and average citizens have prepared the way for characters to be both exceptional and relatable in the minds of today's youth. Likewise, the prevalence of Disney's princess culture insures that royals can be easily relatable, particularly to young American girls. Far from making mythological characters unrelatable, their exceptionalism can be an asset in demonstrating the qualities that resiliency requires. Survivors of trauma at all ages often feel that they are somehow responsible for what has happened to them, either because they deserved to suffer or simply because they did not actively resist hard enough to avoid being mistreated.<sup>11</sup> The fact that the characters of myth are often princess or semi-divine beings conveys to young readers that both suffering adversity and being unable to overcome it without outside aid are normal occurrences for all persons. They do not reflect a private weakness and are not a reason to feel ashamed.

Male mythological heroes also appear in modern novels, but they are seldom called upon to show resilience in the face of insuperable tribulations in modern US juvenile fiction. Heroes such as Odysseus and Perseus often lend themselves to exciting tales of adventure, in books with both male and female protagonists. Characterizations of male heroes are used to tell coming-of-age stories about individuals discovering their true powers and conquering, rather than enduring,

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<sup>10</sup> Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1977 (ed. pr. 1976), 35–41.

<sup>11</sup> Edward S. Kubany and Susan B. Watson, "Guilt: Elaboration of a Multidimensional Model", *Psychological Record* 53.1 (2003), 51–90; Edward S. Kubany, Francis R. Abueg, Julie A. Owens, Jerry M. Brennan, Aaron S. Kaplan, and Susan B. Watson, "Initial Examination of a Multidimensional Model of Trauma-Related Guilt: Applications to Combat Veterans and Battered Women", *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment* 17.4 (1995), 353–376, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02229056>; Sabrina Stotz, Thomas Elbert, Veronika Müller, and Maggie Schauer, "The Relationship between Trauma, Shame, and Guilt: Findings from a Community-Based Study of Refugee Minors in Germany", *European Journal of Psychotraumatology* 6.1 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.3402/ejpt.v6.25863>.

adversity. Percy Jackson of Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series discovers himself to be the son of the god Poseidon and to have the ability to control water. He then goes on a number of quests that culminate in his ultimate defeat of the series' main villain, the Titan Kronos.<sup>12</sup> The same pattern of self-discovery and heroic triumph plays out in Francesca Lia Block's *Love in the Time of Global Warming*, a post-apocalyptic retelling of the *Odyssey* with a female protagonist.<sup>13</sup> Myths that focus on the fate of ancient male heroes are used to tell stories about young people learning to exercise their agency.<sup>14</sup>

Mythical retellings that focus on female characters, on the other hand, tend to have the opposite narrative. In their ancient context, heroines of Greek myth seldom live happily ever after and are hardly ever able to make their own choices. Often, they are victims within their stories, sacrifices either to the gods' will or the hero's plot line. Aphrodite promises Helen of Troy to Paris as a bribe for awarding her the Golden Apple. In some versions of the myth written in the ancient world Helen goes to Troy willingly, in some versions she is kidnapped, but even so the goddess barter away her body long before she, Helen, is aware of Paris's existence. Once Troy is sacked, the women of Troy are allotted to the Greek heroes as war prizes. Ariadne is driven by the gods to love Theseus to ensure that he has the help that he needs to accomplish his quest (killing the Minotaur) only to be left to die by her ungrateful hero. This plot is a common pattern for foreign royal women in ancient mythology; it is repeated in the stories of Medea, Scylla, Dido, and Hypsipyle. The women of myth have little control over their physical persons or even their own emotions. More powerful forces dictate their very feelings, as well as their actions.

Mythical women's very lack of agency makes them excellent vessels to demonstrate psychological resilience, a character trait essential to surviving a metaphorical storm. Many US authors, most of them female, choose to revisit myths of catastrophic hardship from the point of view of female characters. In

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<sup>12</sup> Rick Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, 5 vols., New York, NY: Miramax Books and Hyperion Books for Children, 2005–2009. On this series' protagonist, see the chapter by Michael Stierstorfer, "From an Adolescent Freak to a Hope-Spreading Messianic Demigod: The Curious Transformations of Modern Teenagers in Contemporary Mythopoetic Fantasy Literature (*Percy Jackson, Pirates of the Caribbean, The Sirena Legacy*)", 219–229.

<sup>13</sup> Francesca Lia Block, *Love in the Time of Global Warming*, New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2013.

<sup>14</sup> For the use of the myth of Hercules in the context of psychology and autism, see this volume's chapters by Susan Deacy, "Hercules: Bearer of Hope for Autistic Children?", 251–274, and Edoardo Pecchini, "Promoting Mental Health through the Classics: Hercules as Trainer in Today's Labours of Children and Young People", 275–325.

spite of their subject matter, the retellings are not tragic in the sense that they focus on the character's suffering. Instead, they concentrate on the ways that female characters survive hardship, both physically and emotionally. In order to tell stories about survivors, rather than victims, the characters use strategies that develop psychological resilience. Such novels provide their young audiences with guides to get through the very real traumas they might face growing up.

Authors who portray mythical heroines surviving trauma do not hide the brutality of the myths from their young audiences but instead demonstrate the horrors of war, murder, slavery, and rape unambiguously but without graphic description. The content differs from more hero-based novelizations of myth, which often conceal the aftermath of battle and cut gendered violence. Occasionally, authors of resilience-focused narratives will even make their didactic purposes clear in afterwards which detail primary source material and explain the rest of the mythic tradition around their chosen subject matter.

## Psychological Resilience: Definitions and Strategies

Resilience is the key characteristic necessary for children and teenagers to survive the setbacks of childhood, both minor and major. The term was coined in the 1980s to describe the quality of responding in a positive manner to adverse events, from small temporary setbacks to catastrophic personal trauma. To quote the definition provided by the American Psychological Association (APA):

Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress – such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace and financial stressors. It means “bouncing back” from difficult experiences.<sup>15</sup>

Highly resilient children have the necessary coping mechanisms to recover quickly from adversity and exhibit few risky behaviours later in life, such as using drugs, absenteeism from school, violence, and unsafe sexual practices.<sup>16</sup> One of the strongest predictors of resilience among children and young adults

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<sup>15</sup> “Building Your Resilience”, American Psychological Association, 2012, <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx> (accessed 4 August 2019).

<sup>16</sup> Emmy E. Werner and Ruth Smith, *Overcoming the Odds: High Risk Children from Birth to Adulthood*, Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1992, 55–57.



is literacy.<sup>17</sup> Primary and secondary school students who read extensively often have encountered successful coping strategies for adverse events in the course of their reading and are able to apply them to a similar event occurring in real life.<sup>18</sup> As a result of their exposure to stressful situations within the safety of the fictional world, voracious readers recover more quickly after a trauma because they are able to contextualize their experiences and draw connections to fictional characters.<sup>19</sup>

Mythical women are particularly useful as didactic models of resilient behaviour because they, like most children, lack agency. Characters such as Helen, Ariadne, and the Trojan women are overmastered by the men in their lives or forced to follow a certain path by uncaring gods. Children and teens are dependent on the adults around them for the basic necessities of life and as such have little personal agency.<sup>20</sup> The similarity in the two situations makes Greek mythological heroines ideal for demonstrating positive and productive responses to traumatic situations that are beyond the control of the individual, that is, how to endure and make the best of a bad situation, and then recover quickly from the after-effects.

The APA has suggested a number of strategies that help to build psychological resilience. These recommendations are best practices for improving one's general quality of life. When followed under adversity, these strategies will aid sufferers to minimize psychological trauma even if they find themselves trapped without the physical autonomy to change their situation. The following points are taken from the APA's recommendations, with a paraphrased explanation to clarify their meaning:

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, 176; Jami Biles Jones, *Helping Teens Cope: Resources for School Library Media Specialists and Other Youth Workers*, Worthington, OH: Linworth Publishing, 2003, 10–11; Nan Henderson, Bonnie Benard, and Nancy Sharp-Light, *Resiliency in Action: Practical Ideas for Overcoming Risks and Building Strength in Youth, Families, and Communities*, Ojai, CA: Resiliency in Action, 2007, 18.

<sup>18</sup> Cecelia Du Toit, *Raising Resilience by Tackling Texts*, Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2012, 106–107; Bonnie Bernard, *Resiliency: What We Have Learned*, San Francisco, CA: WestEd, 2004, 30.

<sup>19</sup> Charlotte S. Huck, Barbara Z. Kiefer, Susan Helper, and Janet Hickman, *Children's Literature in the Elementary School*, Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2004, 439–447; Cathy A. Malchiodi, ed., *Creative Interventions with Traumatized Children*, New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2008, 167–168; Laurie MacGillivray, *Literacy in Times of Crisis: Practices and Perspectives*, New York, NY, and Abingdon: Routledge, 2010, 2–3; Patricia Jean Cianciolo, "Children's Literature Can Affect Coping Behavior", *Personnel & Guidance Journal* 43.9 (1965), 897–898; Walter Sawyer, *Growing Up with Literature*, Albany, NY: Delmar Publishers, 2000, 207–211.

<sup>20</sup> Jo Boyden and Gillian Mann, "Children's Risk, Resilience, and Coping in Extreme Situations", in Michael Ungar, ed., *Handbook for Working with Children and Youth: Pathways to Resilience across Cultures and Contexts*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005, 18–19.

1. Build connections, either with a family member or some other member of the individual's community. Social connections are important to prevent feelings of isolation and bolster the individual's sense of self-worth.
2. Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems. Instead, seek small ways to improve the situation. Although such measures will not solve a crisis, the resultant sense of agency will improve the individual's psychological well-being.
3. Accept that change is a part of living. Instead of dwelling on the past and the loss of a planned future, focus on productive ways to improve the situation.
4. Move towards your goals. Develop realistic goals, no matter how small, and take some positive step towards accomplishing those goals every day.
5. Take decisive actions. When faced with traumatic or dangerous situations, do not detach from reality. Taking decisive action of some kind will prevent trauma-related paralysis.
6. Look for opportunities for self-discovery. Viewing adverse conditions as a way to gain a better understanding of the self after a crisis focuses attention on the positive rather than the negative.
7. Nurture a positive view of yourself. Focus on admirable traits and accomplishments, however minor, and forgive perceived failings.
8. Keep things in perspective and do not allow traumatic events and adverse conditions to overshadow everything else. Keeping those events and conditions contained to their true importance allows the affected individual to see beyond the immediate adversity.
9. Maintain a hopeful outlook, rather than giving in to fear and giving up on the possibility of survival.
10. Take care of yourself, emotionally and physically.<sup>21</sup>

This article will examine these strategies in four young-adult novels targeted at female readers, and demonstrate how authors use mythic heroines to show readers how to cope with trauma when substantial physical action is impossible. Each novel demonstrates multiple strategies from the APA's list (in bold below). The authors who focus on resilient heroines, rather than victorious protagonists, stay close to the original tragic ends of the myths. However, because the heroines practise resilience-building strategies, the authors can offer an ending where a character will survive her ordeal and eventually recover from it.

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<sup>21</sup> After "Building Your Resilience", American Psychological Association.

## Clemence McLaren's Cassandra: Strategies 1, 2, and 3

The first strategy is to **build connections**. Clemence McLaren's *Inside the Walls of Troy* retells the entire Troy tale from Helen's first kidnapping by Theseus until the sack of Troy.<sup>22</sup> A young Helen narrates the first third of the novel. This version of the character chafes at her constrained life, but grows up to be a contented wife and queen of Sparta, only to be swept away by Paris. The rest of the novel detailing the myth from Helen's arrival at Troy through the city's sacking is told by the pragmatic, jaded voice of McLaren's Cassandra. Cassandra is a perfect vehicle to explore resilience in a situation without autonomy. As a prophetess, she is constantly aware of terrible forthcoming events, such as storms at sea, earthquakes, and, of course, the Trojan War itself. However, there is nothing that she can do to prevent disaster. While the Cassandra of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and Euripides' *Trojan Women* is driven insane by both the trauma of the fall of Troy and her own foreknowledge of terrible events, McLaren's Cassandra establishes strong bonds with the members of her family, particularly her twin brother, Helenus, her sisters, Polyxena and Laodice, and even Helen herself. This Cassandra confides her fears and frustrations in her brother, Helenus. His belief eases her sense of helpless isolation, even though they both understand that there is nothing that she can do to prevent her visions from becoming realities (74–79). Cassandra connects with Helen over their shared desire to choose their own husbands and a common feeling of social rejection (95).

Cassandra's resilience is clearest at the end of the novel, right before the Greeks hidden in the wooden horse emerge and begin their sneak attack. She has learned about the plan from Helenus, who had realized that Troy would fall and taken measures to survive. He made a secret agreement to help the Greeks in return for safe conduct for as many of his surviving family members as he could protect. For a moment, Cassandra collapses in the darkness, overwhelmed by the sheer monumentality of the situation (185–186). However, her paralysis is only momentary. Instead of remaining frozen, she chooses instead to take action, to try to bring her sister-in-law, Andromache, to the relative safety of Athena's temple. As a result of her decision, she is able to **avoid seeing the crisis as insurmountable** and once again move to protect herself and others. Instead of breaking under her terror, she is able to think constructively and

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<sup>22</sup> Clemence McLaren, *Inside the Walls of Troy: A Novel of the Women Who Lived the Trojan War*, New York, NY: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 1996. All the subsequent references are from this edition.

save Andromache's life. McLaren makes it clear in her epilogue that Helenus will eventually ransom Andromache and the pair will marry, have several children, and live in relative happiness (196).

Although this novel is aimed at children ages twelve and older, the text does not hide the pain that its characters endure.<sup>23</sup> The women of Troy realize that there is nothing they can do to stop the war; rather than try to deny the situation, they **accept that the change in their lives is inevitable** (103–104, 192). Cassandra is well aware that her suitors, brothers, and city will be lost to the Greek invasion. When her prospective husband, Othronus, is killed, she volunteers to wash his body, knowing that it is all that she can do for him. Helen speaks regretfully of the life that the pair could have led together, but Cassandra focuses on the reality of the situation, telling Helen that if she, Helen, wants to help, she should get more oil for anointing the body (114–115).

At the end of the novel, Cassandra is prepared to endure Agamemnon's sexual exploitation, realizing that she cannot save herself (184). Even so, she does not see her current situation as totally insurmountable. Cassandra is aware that there is nothing that she can do to save herself or the other Trojan women from becoming war prizes, but she takes comfort in the knowledge that Helen will protect them to the best of her ability and Helenus will ransom them as soon as he is able (192, 180).

Polyxena seduces Achilles during the book's equivalent of the *Iliad's* ransom scene in order to discover his weakness, then passes the knowledge on to Paris (164–168). Cassandra acknowledges that the Greeks will kill her sister for her role in Achilles' death, just as she acknowledges earlier that she cannot save a catatonic Helen from becoming Deiphobus' chattel after Paris's death (168–170). Yet the text ends not in a destructive battle scene, but with an image of the strength through community. Cassandra and her sisters take sanctuary in the temple of Athena. The sisters stand together, holding hands and comforting each other, finding the strength in their bonds of friendship to endure until their allies can help them (192). It is a realistic portrait of how to survive extreme hardship and have the best chance for a psychological recovery.

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<sup>23</sup> Vendor website for *Inside the Walls of Troy* by McLaren, <http://www.simonandschuster.com/books/Inside-the-Walls-of-Troy/Clemence-McLaren/9780689873973> (accessed 2 May 2020).



## Caroline Cooney's *Anaxandra*: Strategies 4 and 8

Another novelization of the Troy tale offers additional strategies to develop resilience: **keep things in perspective**. This method of nurturing resilience does not mean that a person should downplay or deny the hardships in his or her situation. Instead, it discourages sufferers from dwelling on their hardships to the point where they seem insurmountable. In Caroline Cooney's book *Goddess of Yesterday*, the main character, Anaxandra, is an excellent model of how to keep things in perspective.<sup>24</sup> The book retells the beginning of the Troy tale from Anaxandra's point of view. At the start of the novel, she is a six-year-old child taken as a hostage to force her family of pirates to pay tribute to the king of Siphnos, Nicander. She innocently discloses the location of her father's treasure vault, an underwater cave, and her family loses their wealth to Nicander's forces. Her captor tells Anaxandra that she has lost her value as a hostage because her father will not want her back after her betrayal, but he takes her to Siphnos as a companion to his paraplegic daughter, Callisto. Although Anaxandra loses her family, her home, and eventually her freedom of movement as she is confined to the palace *gynaikēion*, she understands that she can still rejoice that she has the ability to move under her own power as Callisto cannot (11).

Throughout the book, as she becomes part of Menelaus' household, then is taken to Troy as one of Helen's slaves, Anaxandra lists the names of the kings who have been kind to her, protecting her from harm and treating her as a member of their families: Nicander of Siphnos, who treats her as a foster daughter for six years even though she has no value to him; Menelaus of Sparta, who saves her when Siphnos is sacked by pirates, and holds the island's wealth in trust as her dowry, even though he had every right to claim it as his own (42–66); Priam of Troy, who welcomes her as a princess instead of a slave and incorporates her into his crowd of future daughters-in-law (174). The final king is Euneus of Lemnos, who becomes her refuge once she escapes from the conflict at Troy. This short catalogue becomes the refrain of the book, growing longer as Anaxandra lives through the beginning of the Trojan War, and forms the final words of the novel: "Truly I have been lucky in my kings. Nicander. Menelaus. Priam. Euneus. *O my king*" (254). Anaxandra is often scared, depressed, and in physical danger, but she never forgets the positive experiences that she has enjoyed as well.

<sup>24</sup> Caroline B. Cooney, *Goddess of Yesterday*, New York, NY: Delacorte Press, 2002. All the subsequent references are from this edition.

More than any other of the heroines mentioned thus far, Anaxandra is able to **move towards her goals**. When Helen decides to take her adolescent daughter, Hermione, and infant son, Pleisthenes, along with her to Troy, Anaxandra takes Hermione's place (129). Through her actions, she saves Hermione from being raped and enslaved. Anaxandra then sets herself the goal of protecting Pleisthenes and freeing him if she can. Paris wants the boy to die, and Helen is too obsessed with her own glory to notice that her baby is in danger. Anaxandra enlists Andromache's help to force Paris to keep his sword out of the child's reach (182–184). She bribes household slaves to take care of him and provides him with food when Paris tries to poison him with mercury (215, 229). In the end, she is able to smuggle the boy out of Troy and return him to his father, Menelaus (246–252). Anaxandra is unable to save her foster family on Siphnos; she cannot prevent the ubiquitous slaughter that Helen causes in her search for adoration or the sack of Troy, but she can and does save one little boy's life. She mourns for her dead friends and lost family, but still manages to accomplish something meaningful. As a result, she comes to peace with her past and is able to focus on her future on Lemnos with her last king, her lover Euneus.

## Patrice Kindl's *Xenodice*: Strategies 4, 7, and 10

The myth of Theseus and the Minotaur, refocused on Cretan princesses rather than on the Athenian prince, offers another opportunity for displaying the qualities that promote resilience. Patrice Kindl's *Lost in the Labyrinth* introduces a new daughter of Minos, named Xenodice.<sup>25</sup> She is Ariadne's younger sister and nurtures a secret passion for Daedalus' son, Icarus. Xenodice has a close relationship with her bull-headed brother, here named Asterius, but fears, correctly, that she will not be able to protect him once he reaches adulthood. Although Xenodice is troubled about the future and Ariadne's bullying, she finds the time to **take care of herself**, emotionally. Whenever she is particularly stressed, she visits the palace menagerie and spends time caring for the animals housed there. She describes it as follows:

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<sup>25</sup> Patrice Kindl, *Lost in the Labyrinth*, Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002. All the subsequent references are from this edition.

I passed the cages of the menagerie, which was almost a second home for me. I spent as much time as I could spare helping Lycia, the chief keeper. I fed the animals, talked to them – I even occasionally did servants' work by mucking out kennels and cages. I was happy there; it was my refuge in good times and bad. (19)

The use of the word refuge and the emphasis on the constancy of the menagerie's role in her psychological well-being indicate that the space is Xenodice's emotional anchor. Its separation from the rest of her life allows her to temporarily withdraw from her sociopolitical obligations to a place where she feels empowered. She is well known to the staff and is adept at caring for the animals. Her time in the menagerie gives her self-confidence and a feeling of control that stands her in good stead when the inevitable events of the myth unfold.

Trapped within the confines of the myth, Xenodice cannot protect those that she loves, but she tries. Throughout the book, she **sets herself practical, attainable goals** to save her loved ones. As a result, she is able to recover from the trauma of losing so many of those she cares about because she knows that she has done everything possible to protect them.

When Theseus arrives, he declares publicly that he has come to kill Asterius and is sentenced to be executed for threatening a member of the royal family. Minos hates Asterius, who is manifestly not his own son, and conspires to free Theseus and help him complete his mission. Ariadne also presents a danger to Asterius when she becomes enamored with the Athenian. After she secretly becomes pregnant, she is desperate to escape from Crete with her lover, whatever the cost to her family. Xenodice sets herself the realistic goal of protecting Asterius with her presence. She knows that neither her father nor her sister would be willing to risk her, Xenodice's, life, so she moves into the Labyrinth with her brother and informs her father that she is guarding him (89–91). Xenodice hopes that her father and sister will force Theseus to leave the island without harming the Minotaur in order to protect her.

Ultimately, she is unsuccessful. Ariadne drugs Xenodice so that she falls asleep. When she wakes up early, her father restrains her to prevent her from intervening in the murder, although he cannot stop her from screaming and raising the alarm. Xenodice does not save her brother, but because of her actions she has the comfort of knowing that she did everything possible to protect him. As a result, she does not feel responsible for his death. Instead, she is able to place the guilt for the crime where it belongs. In fact, when Minos tries to blame her for the violence that night, she does not allow him to shift the responsibility onto

her. Instead, she speculates that when she screamed and woke the palace, she saved the lives of the rest of her family (160–161).

After Theseus escapes, Xenodice once again tries to protect the people that she cares about. She tries to shield Icarus and Daedalus from punishment by claiming publicly that she and not they helped Theseus to escape his prison. When her gambit is unsuccessful and the pair is arrested, she provides them with the materials to make their wings. She actually watches Icarus fall from the sky, but she concludes that his beautiful death at a moment of pure happiness is better for him than the quotidian life that she dreamed of sharing (178–179).

The final chapter is set many years after the tragic events of the Minotaur myth. The older Xenodice who narrates the end has survived the traumatic events of the novel and found happiness in spite of her losses. She forgives herself for her role in Icarus' demise and is happy even though she misses him. Xenodice finds resilience in the source of her earlier self-confidence, the menagerie. She has taken on the sacred role as Mistress of Animals, a priesthood borrowed from the Mesopotamian goddess of the same name. Her main responsibility is to care for the menagerie, a position that she is well qualified to fill. The animals under her care thrive and she expands the collection to include animals not native to Crete (188–189).<sup>26</sup> Her success at protecting her charges allows her to **nurture a positive view of herself** in spite of her past failures. She describes her position as "chaste and pure, and much beloved of the Goddess" (187). She has moved beyond the pain of loss and found a new sense of self through her responsibility.

## Tracy Barrett's *Ariadne*: Strategies 3, 6, 7, and 9

In another version of the Minotaur myth, Ariadne takes centre stage. She is a future divine queen in a theocratic Knossos in Tracy Barrett's *Dark of the Moon*.<sup>27</sup> Her religious beliefs offer her a way to **nurture a positive view of herself** and to **find opportunities for self-discovery**. The book takes its inspiration from the fall of Minoan society to the mainland Mycenaean civilization. This Ariadne's society is in crisis as her mother, Pasiphaë, the living personification of Crete's Mother Goddess, has failed to produce a son other than the Minotaur to act as Ariadne's military leader. The situation becomes critical when Barrett's

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<sup>26</sup> Out of her proud additions, she mentions a fictional hippogriff, which is struggling to adjust to Crete's climate, and an elephant that is thriving.

<sup>27</sup> Tracy Barrett, *Dark of the Moon*, Boston, MA: Harcourt, 2011. All the subsequent references are from this edition.

Pasiphaë dies while Ariadne is still too young to take up the position of living goddess and ruler (172–175). Barrett's Theseus is an illegitimate farmer, whose unexpected arrival in Athens as the king's oldest son is an inconvenience for his royal father, stepmother, and legitimate stepbrother. He is sent off to Knossos to get him out of the way, not to save his countrymen (96–97).

Theseus' arrival is the catalyst which leads to a rebellion and ends Ariadne's matriarchy. Theseus and Ariadne bond not as lovers, but as isolated children of rulers asked to fill positions for which they are totally unprepared. The two manage to escape the coup, but in the process Ariadne loses her position as living vessel for the Mother Goddess, a break that ends the Minoan religion. Her Minotaur brother's death is a mercy killing that spares him a much more painful end when it becomes clear that the pair cannot rescue him (284).

At the end of the novel, Ariadne chooses to remain on Naxos because it was a former holy site in her religion. She makes this choice with a **hopeful outlook**. Ariadne stays to revive her goddess's worship as chief priestess of the island. When she explains her choice to Theseus, she looks forward hopefully to a future where she and the women of the island can build a new faith for her goddess through sharing knowledge (299). In the book's epilogue, she anticipates passing her new role, cobbled together from the remnants of her old religion, on to her daughter even as she acknowledges that it will eventually become obsolete (309–310). This version of Ariadne and the Minotaur emphasizes that even when a person's whole world falls apart, when she loses everything, she can still start again and create a new life for herself, as long as she is willing to let go of the past and **accept that change is a part of living**.

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All of the fictional women mentioned are young, around the age of thirteen for the majority of their stories. All of them lose their homes, their families, their entire way of life, and, in the case of Cooney's Anaxandra and Barrett's Ariadne, their very identities. The lives that these mythical princesses live are very different from the lives of modern girls, but their risky situations are terribly familiar. Anaxandra attempts to protect herself and her foster brother, Pleisthenes, from Helen and Paris, who stand *in loco parentis*. Kindl's Xenodice also discovers that her own father is the greatest danger to her and her brother as he has allied himself with Theseus and enabled the murder of his own children.<sup>28</sup> McLaren's Trojan women demonstrate fortitude in the face of sexual assault, a danger that

<sup>28</sup> Kindl, *Lost in the Labyrinth*, 150.



affects one in five women in the United States, 60% before the age of fourteen.<sup>29</sup> Barrett's Ariadne endures a higher-stakes version of something that all young people must overcome in their lives: she is given a responsibility that is too great for her and she fails, with the result that those she loves suffer the consequences of her failure. Young women and girls are often trapped in similar difficult situations, from catastrophic conditions of domestic abuse to more quotidian consequences of personal failure. Although young women of myth suffer great hardship, they are all able to bounce back, to move on with their lives, and in the process they show the reader how to best recover from such traumatic events.

The heroines of Greek mythology are excellent vehicles for promoting the coping skills necessary to develop resilience and providing a small amount of the support necessary for resilience to grow. Like La Fontaine's reeds, they bend, rather than break, weathering the storms of their myth and surviving to see a new chance to thrive.

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<sup>29</sup> The United States Department of Justice, "Questions & Answers about Sexual Assault and Sexual Offending", Dru Sjodin National Sex Offender Public Website, <https://www.nsopw.gov/en/SafetyAndEducation/QuestionsAndAnswers> (accessed 30 June 2021).

The book is to be recommended for academics as well as graduate and post-graduate students working on the reception of Classical Antiquity and its transformations around the world.

David Movrin, University of Ljubljana  
From the editorial review

*Our Mythical Hope* is the latest collection of articles by scholars participating in an ongoing collaboration to ensure that the beauty and profundity of Classical myth remain known, and (hopefully) remain part of our modern culture. The size of this compendium, the sweep of subjects considered, the involvement of leading experts from around the world, all testify to how important and extensive this initiative has become over the last decade. The project's continued commitment to engage all ages, especially the young, and to extend its outreach beyond the Academy merely, makes it a leading model for how research retains its relevance.

Mark O'Connor, Boston College  
From the editorial review



Classical Antiquity is a particularly important field in terms of "Hope studies" [...]. For centuries, the ancient tradition, and classical mythology in particular, has been a common reference point for whole hosts of creators of culture, across many parts of the world, and with the new media and globalization only increasing its impact. Thus, in our research at this stage, we have decided to study how the authors of literary and audiovisual texts for youth make use of the ancient myths to support their young protagonists (and readers or viewers) in crucial moments of their existence, on their road into adulthood, and in those dark hours when it seems that life is about to shatter and fade away. However, if Hope is summoned in time, the crisis can be overcome and the protagonist grows stronger, with a powerful uplifting message for the public. [...] Owing to this, we get a chance to remain true to our ideas, to keep faith in our dreams, and, when the decisive moment comes, to choose not hatred but love, not darkness but light.

Katarzyna Marciniak, University of Warsaw  
From the introductory chapter

