

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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PART V

# Brand New Hope



# THE UTOPIA OF AN IDEAL COMMUNITY: RECONSIDERING THE MYTH OF ATLANTIS IN JAMES GURNEY'S DINOTOPIA: THE WORLD BENEATH

Who does not know the legend of the mighty kingdom of Atlantis which flourished in a time all but forgotten, only to sink within a single day and night? This famous myth centres on a happy and fertile island whose inhabitants initially lived in harmony with the gods and developed a high culture. However, after they yielded to greed and desire for conquest, a natural catastrophe erased the island and its inhabitants. This myth was recounted by the Greek philosopher Plato, who in the dialogues *Timaeus* and *Critias* (approximately 360 BC) narrated the tale of the sunken island of Atlantis that has enthralled readers ever since.

## **Introduction: The Enduring Appeal of the Atlantis Myth**

Myriads of retellings and adaptations testify to the never-ending interest in the Atlantis myth as a universal story about an ideal state. Moreover, the complete destruction of Atlantis has triggered multiple interpretations that allegorically refer to human arrogance and *hubris*. The representation of Atlantis as a lost civilization that incorporated the ideal of peaceful coexistence particularly inspired philosophers, including Francis Bacon, Tommaso Campanella, and Thomas More,<sup>1</sup> to devise utopian societies. Likewise, the Atlantis myth also steadily

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<sup>1</sup> For a thorough analysis of the utopian models developed by these three philosophers and their relationship to Plato, see Otfried Höffe, ed., *Politische Utopien der Neuzeit. Thomas Morus, Tommaso Campanella, Francis Bacon*, Berlin and Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 2016.

gained popularity in literature, comics, film, and the arts,<sup>2</sup> even leaving clear traces in international children's literature.

One may speculate on exactly when Atlantis as a topic emerged in children's literature. An early example is Jules Verne's science-fiction novel *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* (1870),<sup>3</sup> in which Captain Nemo and his companions visit the sunken city of Atlantis. Edith Nesbit touches on the subject in the fantastic children's novel *The Story of the Amulet* (1906),<sup>4</sup> where an amulet serves as a portal to different ancient settings, including Atlantis.<sup>5</sup> The German children's novel *Jim Knopf und die Wilde 13* (1962)<sup>6</sup> by Michael Ende emphasizes the utopian quality of Atlantis by letting the island of Jamballa – as a namesake for Atlantis – finally resurge from the bottom of the sea in order to celebrate the peaceful atmosphere established by Jim Button and his friends. Since the beginning of the new millennium the myth of Atlantis has been playing an increasingly prominent role in young adult literature or crossover fiction, such as Walter Moers's *Die 13½ Leben des Käpt'n Blaubär* (1998)<sup>7</sup>, Eoin Colfer's *Artemis Fowl: The Atlantis Complex* (2010),<sup>8</sup> and the *Atlantis Saga* (3 vols., 2013–2016)<sup>9</sup> by T.A. Barron.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> A wealth of studies have explored the reception and impact of the Atlantis myth on literature, philosophy, and the fine arts; among them are the studies by Lyon Sprague de Camp, *Lost Continents: The Atlantis Theme in History, Science and Literature*, New York, NY: Gnome Press, 1954; Reinhold Bichler, "Atlantis", in Manfred Landfester, ed., *Der Neue Pauly. Enzyklopädie der Antike*, vol. 13: *Rezeptions- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte: A–Fo*, Stuttgart and Weimar: J.B. Metzler, 1999, 334–338; Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *L'Atlantide, petite histoire d'un mythe platonicien*, Paris: Éd. des Belles-Lettres, 2005; and Oliver Kohns and Ourania Sideri, eds., *Mythos Atlantis. Texte von Platon bis J.R.R. Tolkien*, Stuttgart: Reclam, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Jules Verne, *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers*, ill. Alphonse de Neuville and Édouard Riou, ed. J. Hetzel, Paris: Pierre-Jules Hetzel, 1870 [Eng. ed.: *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*, trans. William Butcher, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998].

<sup>4</sup> Edith Nesbit, *The Story of the Amulet*, London: Benn, 1932 (ed. pr. 1906).

<sup>5</sup> The representation of the Atlantis myth in Nesbit's children's book is discussed in Joanna Paul, "Time Is Only a Mode of Thought, You Know": Ancient History, Imagination and Empire in E. Nesbit's Literature for Children", in Lisa Maurice, ed., *The Reception of Ancient Greece and Rome in Children's Literature: Heroes and Eagles*, "Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity" 6, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2015, 30–55.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Ende, *Jim Knopf und die Wilde 13*, Stuttgart: K. Thienemann, 1962.

<sup>7</sup> Walter Moers, *Die 13½ Leben des Käpt'n Blaubär*, Frankfurt: Eichborn, 1992 [Eng. ed.: *The 13½ Lives of Captain Bluebear*, trans. John Brownjohn, London: Vintage, 2001].

<sup>8</sup> Eoin Colfer, *Artemis Fowl: The Atlantis Complex*, New York, NY: Hyperion, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> T.A. Barron, *Atlantis Rising*, New York, NY: Philomel Books, 2013; *Atlantis in Peril*, New York, NY: Philomel Books, 2015; *Atlantis Lost*, New York, NY: Philomel Books, 2016.

<sup>10</sup> For further contemporary young adult novels focusing on Atlantis, see Volker Müller, "Verjüngtes Atlantis: die Rezeption des platonischen Atlantis-Mythos in Kinder- und Jugendmedien der letzten 40 Jahre", in Markus Janka and Michael Stierstorfer, eds., *Verjüngte*



The Atlantis myth also performs an important function in James Gurney's four volumes on Dinotopia (1992–2007), whose imaginative realism and lavishly created images captivated readers from the outset.<sup>11</sup> Gurney himself meticulously drew the natural sceneries and the different kinds of dinosaurs for his books.

Intended for readers of all ages, the books have been published in more than thirty countries and have sold tens of millions of copies worldwide, while Gurney – who is both the writer and illustrator – has been showered with awards. About a dozen different natural history museums and art museums have showcased solo exhibitions of Gurney's illustrations, including the Natural Museums in New York and Washington, DC. A live-action television miniseries and various computer games have additionally contributed to the popularization of Dinotopia. Considering this huge success, it is simply incredible that scholars working in the realm of children's literature have totally disregarded this unusual artwork. The reasons for this neglect remain elusive.

A particular characteristic of these illustrated novels is the blending of different, even contradictory concepts. This strategy determines the depiction of certain characters as well as the cultural and historical underpinnings of Dinotopia. In order to comprehend the complex levels of meaning in these diverse forms of blending, my analysis is based on the theoretical framework of conceptual blending introduced by the cognitive linguists Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner in 1992 and further developed in their benchmark study *The Way We Think* (2002).<sup>12</sup>

Conceptual blending is a basic mental operation that leads to new meaning, global insight, and conceptual compressions useful for memory and the understanding of otherwise diffuse ranges of meaning. It plays a fundamental role in the construction of meaning in everyday life, in the arts and sciences, and particularly in the social sciences. In his seminal study *The Literary Mind* (1997),

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*Antike. Griechisch-römische Mythologie und Historie in zeitgenössischen Kinder- und Jugendmedien*, "Studien zur europäischen Kinder- und Jugendliteratur / Studies in European Children's and Young Adult Literature" 5, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2017, 265–286; Michael Stierstorfer, *Antike Mythologie in der Kinder- und Jugendliteratur der Gegenwart. Unsterbliche Götter und Heldengeschichten?*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2017, esp. 365–373. For a survey on the reception of Classical Antiquity in children's literature, see Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, "Children's and Young Adult Literature", in Manfred Landfester, ed., *Brill's New Pauly: Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World. Classical Tradition*, vol. 1: *A–Del*, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2006, coll. 750–754.

<sup>11</sup> See the collection available on the author's official website: <http://jamesgurney.com/site/> (accessed 14 April 2020).

<sup>12</sup> Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities*, New York, NY: Basic Books, 2002.

Turner explains: "Conceptual blending is a fundamental instrument of the everyday mind".<sup>13</sup>

The essence of cognitive blending is to construct a partial match between two different concepts, in order to selectively project from those concepts into a novel "blended" mental space. It has been argued that the capacity for complex conceptual blending is the crucial ability needed for thought and language, particularly when it comes to creative thinking and the mastering of sophisticated and extensive networks. This cognitive operation consists in combining images and ideas into a network of mental spaces to create new meaning. Very often this mapping process is based on analogy – that is, the recognition of shared properties and the capability to transfer knowledge from one domain to another. Hence, the framework of conceptual blending may provide an insight into the sophisticated arrangement and unusual appearances of characters, settings, and cultural artifacts in literature. Against this background, the unexpected combination of entities and properties in Gurney's books challenges the reader inasmuch as they are invited to ponder the power of imagination. It is exactly this cognitive process which is needed in order to fully grasp the sophisticated structure and layers of meaning in the *Dinotopia* novels.

## **Dinotopia: A Peaceful Utopia**

The first book in the series, *Dinotopia: A Land Apart from Time* (1992),<sup>14</sup> introduces the main characters, the setting, and the historical, societal, and cultural background. The book starts with a preface that correctly states that the many species of dinosaurs have been extinct for more than 150 million years. However, by claiming peremptorily that dinosaurs are still living animals – against all expectations – the author prepares the audience for the subsequent text that serves as a frame story. To this extent, the author maintains that he accidentally found a worn and water-damaged sketchbook diary written by a forgotten explorer in a British university library. While paging through the book, he was stunned by drawings that showed people and dinosaurs living together. By adopting the position of an editor who shares his chance discovery with the readers, Gurney provides a double twist. The book the prospective reader is about to peruse is nothing other than a very old notebook written by a natural

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<sup>13</sup> Mark Turner, *The Literary Mind: The Origins of Thought and Language*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, 93.

<sup>14</sup> James Gurney, *Dinotopia: A Land Apart from Time*, London: Dorling Kindersley, 1992.

scientist. Consequently, it seems to belong to the category of non-fiction, additionally stressed by the accurate drawings, maps, and diagrams. However, at the same time, attentive readers should be aware that the notebook and drawings are Gurney's own artwork. Consequently, the question of whether this book is a mere fantasy or a true report of a lost civilization is left to the reader. Although the illustrations and information about the dinosaurs, plants, and old-fashioned habits of the inhabitants refer to alleged academic sources and astonish the reader by their precision and objectivity, the narrative displays a utopian idea.

Set in the 1860s, the novels are written in the guise of a nineteenth-century explorer's diaries and deal with the adventures of the British biologist Arthur Denison and his young son, Will. They are shipwrecked on the shores of an uncharted island called Dinotopia. This island is inhabited by humans and sentient dinosaurs who live together peacefully and have formed a complex and independent society (see Fig. 1). Outside of Dinotopia, dinosaurs have been extinct for millions of years and not a part of the Victorian era Arthur Denison and Will come from, such that the civilization on this island seems to have fallen out of time – as the book's title has already indicated. The European concept of time obviously does not matter on Dinotopia. Although people and animals are born, grow up, and age, the environmental and societal circumstances do not change much. Life on Dinotopia seems to be a portrayal of humanity's Golden Age, a topic which is openly addressed in the second volume.



**Figure 1:** Dinosaur parade, illustration by James Gurney from his *Dinotopia: A Land Apart from Time*, London: Dorling Kindersley, 1992, 152–153. Used with kind permission from the Author.

Shipwrecks are gradually introduced into the history, culture, and political system of Dinotopia. The reader learns that the islanders are the descendants of people shipwrecked on Dinotopia more than 400 years ago. Just a few are still able to speak an old form of English; instead, they have developed a novel language which partially consists of gestures and onomatopoeic sounds in order to enable communication with the dinosaurs. To accentuate their deep engagement with the dinosaurs, the islanders have created a greeting of peace: “Breathe deep, seek peace”, accompanied by a soothing and friendly gesture.

Over the course of the centuries, this living together has led to a highly sophisticated society with a new alphabet, consisting of footprints, a parliament whose members are dinosaurs and people alike, a law code, and different professions, equally practised by dinosaurs and people. However, this form of cohabitation includes only herbivorous dinosaurs, while the carnivorous dinosaurs remain among themselves, living outside the human settlements, and always posing a risk to travellers. While Arthur Denison is eager to know as much as possible about the ecosystem, the building facilities, and the ancient history of Dinotopia, Will finally decides to become a skybax rider – that is, a pilot of a flying dinosaur.



**Figure 2:** Waterfall City, illustration by James Gurney from his *Dinotopia: A Land Apart from Time*, London: Dorling Kindersley, 1992, 62–63. Used with kind permission from the Author.

A map of the island, which is printed at the beginning of the story, enables the reader to follow the route Arthur and Will take during a time span of four years. By travelling to various spots on the island, they come across



sundry villages and cities whose architecture is overwhelming. Waterfall City is a beautiful metropolis surrounded by huge waterfalls that can be crossed only by flying dinosaurs and small planes (see Fig. 2). The city itself presents a mixture of Italian Renaissance buildings, Egyptian and Roman temples, and gorgeous buildings in an Oriental style. Treetown mainly consists of houses situated in large trees with stairs and bridges crossing the gaps. The next stop is Canyon City, a place where all buildings have been carved into stone. Parts of this city recall Egyptian temples and also display carvings that tell the ancient history of Dinotopia. This setting is the training camp for future skybax riders. Tentpole of the Sky is situated in the snowy mountains and looks like a Tibetan monastery in the Himalayan Mountains. The final destination is Sauropolis, the capital of Dinotopia. From a bird's eye view, this city resembles Venice, while the architecture presents a combination of Roman monuments and temples as well as classicist buildings.

As the meticulously painted images demonstrate, Gurney has put much effort in creating a new world whose inspiration sources are easily discernible: architecture and sculpture from Old Egypt to Classicism, Renaissance as well as Pre-Raphaelite paintings, and the famous architectural drawings by Giovanni Battista Piranesi and Karl Friedrich Schinkel, among others. This conceptual blending of architectural and artistic styles from different periods contributes to the establishment of an ideal setting that reflects the pluralistic worldview of the Dinotopians. By this strategy they refer to ancient cultural achievements from outside of the island. Despite this variety of styles, the newly erected cities and buildings provide an atmosphere of harmony and beauty that extends traditional aesthetics ideas, thus creating something new and unforeseen. Moreover, these cityscapes represent the comfortable and peaceful way of Dinotopian society. As the name of the island already indicates, the cohabitation of dinosaurs and humans represents a utopia, which stands in sharp contrast to the diffuse and troublesome Victorian era outside of Dinotopia. The depiction of such a utopian society provides the basis for the second volume, in which the prehistory of Dinotopia is partially revealed.

## **Looking for Atlantis: The Sunken Kingdom of Poseidos**

In order to capture and hold the reader's curiosity, the first book finishes with a cliffhanger: Arthur Denison has explored a mysterious cave system beneath the island. Striving to study the prehistory of Dinotopia, he is intrigued by the

rumours that a sunken city called Poseidos is hidden in the heretofore unexplored underground. However, the end of the first volume does not disclose whether Arthur could find any clues that confirm the veracity of the hearsay.

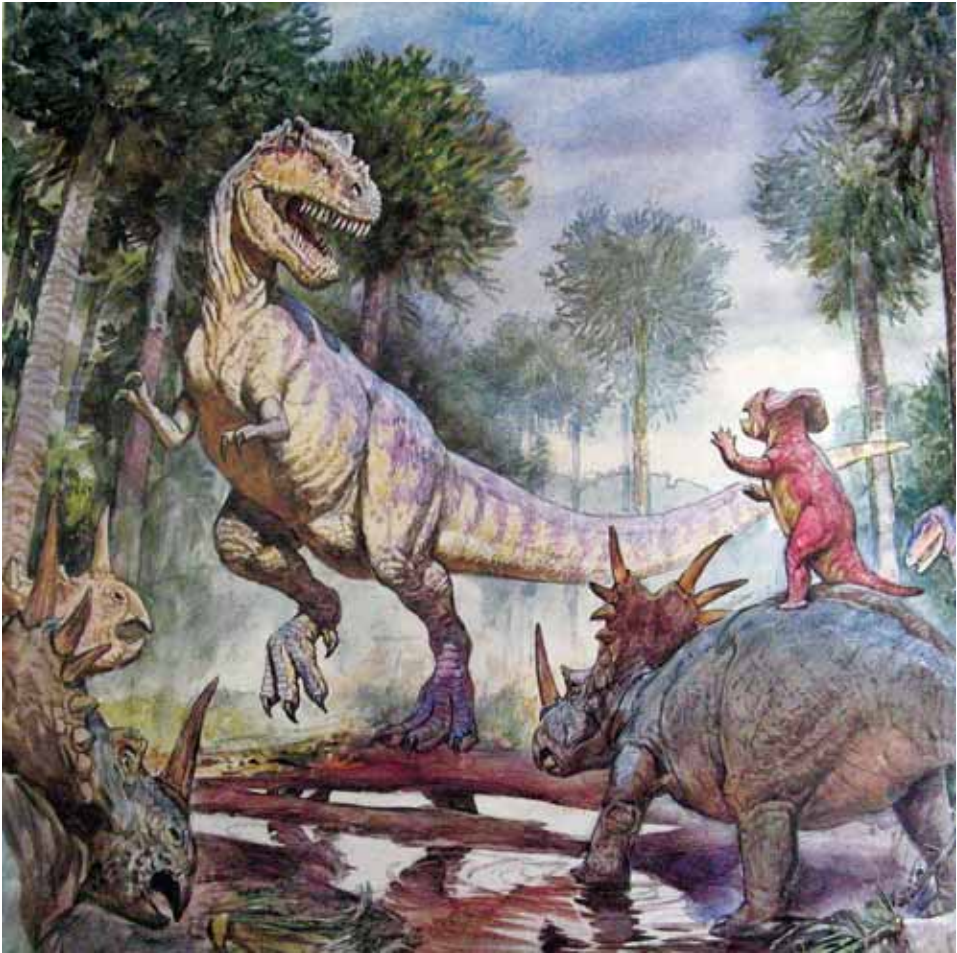
The second volume, *Dinotopia: The World Beneath* (1995, rev. ed. 2012),<sup>15</sup> reveals that Arthur has found a ruby crystal, a fragment of a key, and some precious artifacts whose style refers to the ancient cultures of Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America. Quite surprisingly, these artworks depict dinosaurs together with humans.

During an official meeting, Arthur learns the myth of King Ogthar, who founded Poseidos and allegedly brought luck and wealth to the city with the support of “sunstones”. These are crystals that radiate a mysterious energy when coming into contact with sunlight. According to this legend, Poseidos has been completely destroyed by the sea, but some inhabitants including the then-king were able to escape, hiding in the caves for a very long time. The invaluable golden treasure of Ogthar has been entrusted to another king, but no evidence is given who this king is. As a born scientist, Arthur is quite sceptical about this myth, which he dismisses as an invented story. What he is more interested in is what these sunstones could tell him about ancient science.

Accompanied by the eloquent dinosaur Bix, who is able to speak human language; the inscrutable treasure seeker Lee Crabb, who offers his submarine as the only suitable vehicle to cross the subterranean waters; and a young woman, Oriana Nascava, who is in possession of the missing half of the key and wishes to find out more about her ancestors (her second name can be translated as “born in the caves”), Arthur officially leads an expedition deep into the secretive caverns, while his son continues his training to become a master pilot. The subsequent story parallels Arthur’s and Will’s adventures until both accidentally meet again above ground, when they successfully repel an attack of ferocious tyrannosaurs (see Fig. 3).

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<sup>15</sup> James Gurney, *Dinotopia: The World Beneath*, London: Dorling Kindersley, 1995; 20th anniversary ed., New York, NY: Calla Editions, 2012. The third volume, *Dinotopia: First Flight*, New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1999, is a prequel to the first two volumes, as it focuses on the forefathers of the actual islanders and the establishment of the skybax rider school. The fourth volume, *Dinotopia: Journey to Chandara*, New York, NY: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2007, describes the main protagonists’ journey to the interior of the island. It would be interesting to investigate the whole quartet in relation to the development of the characters, the narrative strategies, and the significance of time and place. On the issue of seriality in children’s literature, see Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, “Seriality”, in Clémentine Beauvais and Maria Nikolajeva, eds., *The Edinburgh Companion to Children’s Literature*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017, 167–178.



**Figure 3:** Bix in conversation with a *Tyrannosaurus rex*, illustration by James Gurney from his *Dinotopia: A Land Apart from Time*, London: Dorling Kindersley, 1992, 84. Used with kind permission from the Author.

During their underwater expedition, the group has some strange and unusual experiences. The trip underwater reveals that the deep ocean is teeming with creatures from the Paleozoic era which have been regarded as extinct species, at least by the people outside of Dinotopia. The idea that the Mesozoic era – as the official period of the dinosaurs – has survived in the plains of Dinotopia is thus extended to the ancient history of the Earth, when early forms of life had populated the planet.

While the deep ocean and the underwater channels are the realm of animals from the trilobite era, the coastal area and the plains are the domains

of dinosaurs, whereas the mountains of Dinotopia are populated by early mammals, such as the mammoth and the smilodon. The evolution of the island's fauna has come to a full stop with the early mammals, with a back extension into the pre-Jurassic period through to the trilobite period. Thus, the animal world of Dinotopia includes three different eras of geological history that precede the history of humankind and encompass diverse steps in the evolution. Animals of our time are completely missing on the island, such that Dinotopia can be regarded as a preserve of early Earth history, about which humans have only limited knowledge. The once shipwrecked people living on Dinotopia are or have been in the unusual situation of coping with fauna about whose living conditions they know nothing.



**Figure 4:** Treasure chamber of King Ogthar, illustration by James Gurney from his *Dinotopia: The World Beneath*, New York, NY: Calla Editions, 2012, 135. Used with kind permission from the Author.



These very circumstances are quite exceptional, but they are topped by the myth of King Ogthar, who is half human, half dinosaur, and therefore considered a representative of a new species: anthroceratops (see Fig. 4).<sup>16</sup> This idea is a typical example of conceptual blending: the concepts of dinosaurs and people form a common ground. Both belong to the generic space of living creatures, yet they belong to two distinct categories: animals versus humans. By the blending of these two concepts, a new blended concept or space emerges – that is, a hybrid of dinosaur and human, which is expressed in the Greek notion of “anthroceratops”. The term can be translated as “human hornface”, whereby “hornface” (= ceratops) refers to a genus of herbivorous dinosaurs.

Gurney introduced a new blended concept with the anthroceratops, which ingeniously combines two properties: the power and strength of the dinosaurs and the capacity for reflection and rationality of humans, to an astounding effect. Therefore, King Ogthar was able to create huge robot-like machines, which Arthur and his companions discover in a laboratory hidden in the caves. As Arthur eventually discloses the mystery of the sunstones and the machines – when the sunstones are fixed on the machines, they are capable of walking and carrying heavy loads or serving as vehicles – he sets out to unveil the truth obviously hidden in the story about Poseidos, thus far regarded merely as a myth.

By venturing into the dangerous realm of the carnivorous dinosaurs, Arthur Denison finds out that the treasure of King Ogthar has been handed over to a dinosaur specimen whose Latin name refers to “king” – *Tyrannosaurus rex*. The tyrannosaurs together with the gigantosaurs<sup>17</sup> guard the treasure and defend it against intruders. This explains their aggressive behaviour towards the caravans and travel groups that cross their realm. They do not attack human travellers and the accompanying herbivorous dinosaurs as potential prey, but more likely intend to prevent them taking notice of the invaluable treasure.

As Arthur and Oriana win the confidence of the leader of the gigantosaurs, they are allowed to access the treasure chamber under the condition that they do not take anything away. Among the precious jewellery they discover a bust that resembles the Egyptian Nefertiti as well as Oriana herself who, as it turns

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<sup>16</sup> Gurney, *Dinotopia: The World Beneath*, 94 (all references are to the 2012 anniversary ed.).

<sup>17</sup> Thanks to his close cooperation with palaeontologists, Gurney was well informed about excavation projects. While working on the storyboard for the second volume, he immediately got the news about the discovery of a novel gigantic carnivorous dinosaur that was even bigger than *Tyrannosaurus rex*. The artist then used this information to change the storyline in order to introduce the gigantosaurs as a new species and as characters who play a significant role in the disclosure of the unsolved mystery of the island’s prehistory.

out, is a direct descendant of the former royal dynasty of Poseidos. However, they are informed by Bix that the artwork is Chandaran, an art period of ancient Dinotopia. Bix contends that “thousands of years ago, a group of Chandarans managed to travel off-island and export a bit of their civilization”.<sup>18</sup> This assertion implies that Egyptian culture was influenced by Dinotopians.<sup>19</sup> The same applies to other ancient cultures – for instance, the Sumerians, the Mayas, Ancient Indian societies, and Old China, thus explaining, for example, why the dragon as an early sighting of dinosaurs is so prominent in Chinese culture. Arthur takes up this thread by pointing to the similarities between the story of Poseidos and the classical myth of Atlantis.

According to Plato, Atlantis belonged to Poseidon, which may be an explanation for the garbled change of names. As a proof of the existence of Poseidos a.k.a. Atlantis, Arthur discovers an ancient camera that is even older than the pyramids. It is filled with daguerreotypes that visually portray the history of Poseidos: while the first images display a prosperous and peaceful city life, later pictures show that the city’s inhabitants became greedy and led a luxurious lifestyle which chased the dinosaurs away. Built on empty volcano caverns, the foundations of the city were additionally weakened by excavations caused by people digging for gemstones. In the end, the foundations gave way and water from the sea flooded the whole city. Only a couple of people, including the king, could escape. They hid in the caves before striving to establish a new community on the shores and plains of Dinotopia. The treasure was handed over to the tyrannosaurs in exchange for safe passage.

In order to verify the existence of Poseidos, the story takes another turn. On his way home, Arthur not only loses his notebook – which is later caught by a fisherman and sold to diverse collectors, until it comes to rest in the university library – but also throws the precious ruby sunstone into the roaring sea: “Unknown to all of them, the ruins of Poseidos lay on the sea floor directly below them”.<sup>20</sup> While Arthur manages to unravel several mysteries, the final mystery of the actual site of the sunken Poseidos remains unsolved.

Besides this, it is not at all clear how the camera, the magical ruby stone, and the awkward machines came into the possession of Ogthar. His appearance – as visualized in sculptures and monuments – recalls creatures from outer space. This assumption is additionally stressed by Ogthar’s remarkable

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<sup>18</sup> Gurney, *Dinotopia: The World Beneath*, 136.

<sup>19</sup> On the significance of Egypt for the Atlantis myth, see Gwyn Griffiths, “Atlantis and Egypt”, *Historia. Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 34.1 (1985), 3–28.

<sup>20</sup> Gurney, *Dinotopia: The World Beneath*, 148.

intelligence, strength, and inventiveness. Although it is not expressively mentioned in the text, he seems to be the offspring of an advanced alien society, worshipped as a god by the islanders. Regarding this, Ogthar obviously is an equivalent to the Greek god Poseidon who founded Atlantis according to the myth told by Plato. In *Timaeus* (21e–25d) and *Critias* (108e–121c), Plato maintained that Atlantis was built a thousand years before the emergence of Egyptian culture.<sup>21</sup> Closely connected to Egyptian mythologies and handed down by Egyptian priests, the story of Atlantis has been regarded as portraying the cradle of Mediterranean culture as well as an ideal state which paved the way for Ancient Greek civilization.<sup>22</sup> The doom scenario – a wealthy city destroyed by the sea within a day – applies to Atlantis as well as Poseidos (see *Criti.* 116a–c).

The natural reasons for the destruction may be different, but both myths stress that the catastrophe represents punishment for the decadence and *hubris* of the inhabitants. However, while Atlantis and its people have been destroyed forever, the situation is different with Poseidos, as a handful of people managed to escape the deadly flood. They are the founding fathers of the new society on Dinotopia and seem to have learnt their lesson. As they emphasize their adherence to the principles of equality, tolerance, and solidarity, they demonstrate that a society built on these values can persist, thus fulfilling the Romantic concept of the Golden Age. While the Romanticists usually restrict this ideal to humankind, the Dinotopians extend this concept inasmuch they regard dinosaurs as equal members of their community. By doing this, they represent the perfect model of a society that welcomes everybody, whatever their origin, appearance, belief, and species – a true example of diversity and inclusion.

In this regard, one may speculate whether the implementation of the Atlantis myth in the second Dinotopia novel can be characterized as a myth adjustment (“Mythenkorrektur” in German), as formulated by the German classical philologists Martin Vöhler, Bernd Seidensticker, and Wolfgang Emmerich.<sup>23</sup> While the original Atlantis myth with its tragic conclusion primarily served

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<sup>21</sup> On the still existing discussion on the veracity of Plato's myth, see Zdenek Kukal, *Atlantis in the Light of Modern Research*, Prague: Academia, 1984; Heinz-Günther Nesselrath, *Platon und die Erfindung von Atlantis*, München: K.G. Saur, 2002; Heinz-Günther Nesselrath, “Platons Atlantis-Geschichte – ein Mythos?“, in Markus Janka and Christian Schäfer, eds., *Platon als Mythologe. Neue Interpretationen zu den Mythen in Platons Dialogen*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2014 (ed. pr. 2002), 339–353.

<sup>22</sup> On this discussion, see Richard Ellis, *Imagining Atlantis*, New York, NY: Knopf, 1998.

<sup>23</sup> Martin Vöhler, Bernd Seidensticker, and Wolfgang Emmerich, “Zum Begriff der Mythenkorrektur“, in Martin Vöhler, Bernd Seidensticker, and Wolfgang Emmerich, eds., *Mythenkorrekturen. Zu einer paradoxalen Form der Mythenrezeption*, Berlin and New York, NY: De Gruyter, 2005, 1–18.

as an admonition for the inhabitants of Athens at the time of Plato, the myth of Poseidos shows a way out, as it has established the foundations for the emerging new society on Dinotopia. By adjusting the ancient myth of Atlantis to a new context, Gurney manages to reveal the dystopian as well as utopian aspects hidden in the classical myth. On this basis, he has created a new myth, whose close link with actual political and cultural issues points to the myth's timeless modernity.

In the same vein, the twist that a myth finally turns into a true story points to a discussion that has determined the scientific research on Plato's dialogues from the beginning. Since Plato maintained that the myth of Atlantis is actually based on real occurrences that happened a long time ago, researchers have disputed how the notions of *μῦθος* (*mýthos*) and *λόγος* (*lógos*), as they have been used by the philosopher, could be interpreted. As Plato admitted that the Atlantis narrative had been handed down over at least two generations in his family and that the informant is a well-known storyteller, it is left open whether the story is pure imagination or based upon facts. According to recent studies in the field of classical philology, the notions of "mythos" and "logos" represent different ways of thinking.<sup>24</sup> Both may communicate truths, although seen from different angles and worldviews. This complementary perspective pervades the Dinotopia novels as well. While Arthur Denison as a scientist is initially sceptical about the truth of the Poseidos myth, he discovers that he was wrong when he finds evidence for the existence of Poseidos. Moreover, the readers are put in almost the same situation as Arthur, as they have to decide whether they believe in the veracity of the Dinotopia universe – with the diaries stored in the library serving as proof – or categorize the books as pure fiction. The metafictional device of an editor who does nothing more than prepare for publication an accidentally discovered diary or document written by somebody else, has a venerable literary tradition and has been revived by Gurney in a sophisticated and cheeky manner.

## Creating a Meta-Myth

What makes the myth of Poseidos as an equivalent to the Atlantis myth so appealing is its tight connection with the history of Ancient Egypt, ancient

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<sup>24</sup> Herwig Görgemanns, "Wahrheit und Fiktion in Platons Atlantis-Erzählung", *Hermes* 128 (2000), 405–420; Bernd Manuwald, "Platons Mythenerzähler", in Markus Janka and Christian Schäfer, eds., *Platon als Mythologe. Neue Interpretationen zu den Mythen in Platons Dialogen*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2014 (ed. pr. 2002), 113–135.



cultures from the Orient, the Far East, and South America as well as Ancient Greece. Gurney thus created a meta-myth that encompasses diverse ancient human cultures. Moreover, this meta-myth also includes the Mesozoic era – the time of the dinosaurs – and a potentially highly developed culture in outer space.

This meta-myth is a perfect example of conceptual blending as it mingles various cultures from diverse places of the world and even beyond. By combining these multiple references, Gurney extends the original myth of Atlantis in various dimensions and touches on issues such as time, space, and population. As for the first issue, time, the story of Poseidos and Dinotopia goes back to early pre-human history on the one hand, and has connections to contemporary history (the shipwrecks from Victorian England) on the other. The second dimension, space, points to the idea of multiple worlds, that is, potential cultures beyond the planet Earth as well as uncharted areas on Earth and even beneath the Earth's surface, which cannot be accessed. The final issue, population, refers to the peaceful cohabitation of dinosaurs and humans, thus qualifying the alleged intellectual, social, and moral superiority of humankind.

If one takes the impact of conceptual blending on creative thinking and aesthetic perception seriously, the Dinotopia novels exemplify how this cognitive and aesthetic model functions as regards the interpretation of the multiple cross references to historical, cultural, societal, and biological issues. On the basis of the ancient myth of Atlantis, Gurney has developed a new fictional universe whose societal system represents an ideal community. This community is revealed to be utopian in character as it is capable of uniting diverse ways of life as well as contradictory attitudes which span a period from the trilobite era to contemporary times, thus covering a wealth of ancient and alien cultures.

By transgressing boundaries in multiple respects, the actual life on Dinotopia seems to present the Golden Age *in nuce*.<sup>25</sup> This topic crops up in a discussion between Arthur and Oriana. While Arthur proposes reusing the machines and sunstones to make life easier on Dinotopia, thus establishing a new Golden Age, Oriana counters that the Golden Age already exists on the island due to the well-balanced relationship between people and dinosaurs as well as the proximity of the islanders to nature:

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<sup>25</sup> Regarding the close connection between the Atlantis myth, utopian thinking, and the idea of the Golden Age, see Reinhold Bichler, "Die Position von Atlantis in der Geschichte der Utopie", in Götz Pochat and Brigitte Wagner, eds., *Utopie. Gesellschaftsformen – Künstlerträume*, "Kunsthistorisches Jahrbuch Graz" 26, Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1996, 32–44.

"Those engineers created machines on the verge of life, with real personalities. If we can tame them, harness them for the good of this island, we can bring back the golden age to Dinotopia, an age without vulgarity and drudgery."

"The golden age is here right now," said Oriana. "You just don't see it. No engineer ever invented anything as miraculous as a flower or an egg or a living dinosaur. It's never drudgery to live among them."<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, the rejection of colonialism, suppression, and intolerance complies with the concept of an ideal state, which clearly contrasts with the political situation in the Western hemisphere in the 1860s, when European nations aspired to increase their power by founding colonies. Driven by an imperialist desire, these states opened the door to intolerance, racism, nationalism, and colonialism. Against this background and considering the consequences of these attitudes that finally led to multiple devastating wars in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the utopian social system on Dinotopia provides an exemplary and timeless model even for our modern times.

By transforming the initial Atlantis myth into a myth of the origin of the actual Dinotopian communities, the Dinotopia novels depict an alternative society, which includes people of different colours, social classes, and ages. Moreover, women, men, and children are treated equally and encouraged to follow their vocations. Living on a par with the dinosaurs, they put their skills at the disposal of all, eager to share their knowledge and ideas with the animals. The amazing and brilliantly coloured illustrations surely increase the attractiveness of this utopian community, which casually blends diverse cultural and mythical concepts.

Because of addressing an audience of young people and adults alike, the Dinotopia novels certainly belong to the category of crossover fiction.<sup>27</sup> Yet the novels are typical examples of the process of genre hybridization, as they combine fantasy, non-fiction, romance, adventure story, and literary utopia. Moreover, the inter pictorial references to diverse artistic styles and the use of a number of visual techniques and image formats increase the books' attractiveness for readers of all ages. The hybrid mixture of genres and the different main characters lay the basis for the multiple addressees of the Dinotopia novels. They may be read as enticing adventure stories that captivate readers.

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<sup>26</sup> Gurney, *Dinotopia: The World Beneath*, 122.

<sup>27</sup> On the significance of crossover literature that transcends the strict borders between children's and adult literature, see Sandra L. Beckett, *Crossover Fiction: Global and Historical Perspectives*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2009.

They may be regarded as an imaginative and fantastic space replete with fantastic creatures, natural settings, and architecture. They may also be interpreted as a literary utopia that encourages the reader to reflect on humanity's political, societal, moral, and cultural obligations. And finally, they may be seen as a stimulus prompting reconsideration of the impact of ancient myths.<sup>28</sup> In this respect, the Atlantis myth seems to be very attractive, particularly in our global times. Considering the increasing number of dystopian novels for young people, books like the Dinotopia novels show that a dystopia always needs a counterpart in a utopia as a model of how peaceful cohabitation may function.

Finally, the manifold processes of conceptual blending, which is necessary to understand the meaning of the story, demand the reader's capacity to switch between different dimensions that touch on issues such as time, space, evolution, society, and culture. Gurney thus has established a sophisticated network of meanings that draw readers back to such myths as that of Atlantis, as they reveal an astounding modernity when it comes to reflecting on the diverse and manifold achievements of humankind.

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<sup>28</sup> Regarding the significance of retellings of ancient myths and fairy tales in contemporary children's literature, see Robyn McCallum and John Stephens, *Retelling Stories, Framing Cultures: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children's Literature*, New York, NY: Routledge, 1998. Some classical myths are particularly popular in actual children's and young adult novels – e.g., the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. See Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, "Orpheus and Eurydice: Reception of a Classical Myth in Children's Literature", in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Childhood... The Classics and Literature for Children and Young Adults*, "Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity" 8, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2016, 291–306.

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

