

UPON^{THE} WILD WAVES

A Journey Through Myth in Children's Books

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The Children of Lir illustration ©PJ Lynch 2014 from
The Names Upon The Harp by Marie Heaney, published by Faber.



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COLÁISTE NA TRÍONÓIDE, BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH

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Upon the Wild Waves: A Journey through Myth in Children's Books serves as a celebration of the wealth of wonderful children's literature held at Trinity College Library. From *Romanæ historiae Anthologia* (Thomas Godwin, 1648) to *Hagwitch* (Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick, 2013), the exhibition explores some of the varying ways in which writers and illustrators have used myth to engage and excite younger readers.

Sourced from Trinity College Library which holds over 150,000 children's books – approximately 10,500 of which are from The Pollard Collection of Children's Books – the display features a range of important texts that engage with myths from around the world, with a particular emphasis on English-language books and on tales from Irish authors. In presenting traditional versions of myths alongside contemporary re-writes, the exhibition offers an introduction to the many complex ways in which children's literature can explore what it means to be human. Myth contains a poetry that transcends the limitations of history and science. These stories not only give us a sense of where we may have come from but they also provide maps for where we might want to go in life.

Specific mythologies have had a significant influence on the development of children's literature in Ireland, Britain and America. The holdings at Trinity College Library offer a glimpse into such processes at work over several hundred years.

The exhibition is arranged into several sections:



Siegfried and the Dragon. From *The Heroic Life and Exploits of Siegfried the Dragon Slayer*, by Wilhelm Kaulbach (London, 1848)

Biblical Myths

Early children's literature is heavily influenced by biblical tales, with many authors – such as Mrs (Sarah) Trimmer – using these stories to write didactic and instructive narratives. As can be seen in the fantasy writing of Philip Pullman, other authors rewrite such narratives and challenge the ways in which Bible stories were often used to present an apparent truth.

Classical Myths

Classical myths provide us with numerous archetypal heroes including Jason, Helen of Troy, Odysseus, and Theseus, who are called to an exciting life of adventure and experience various

rites of passage. These tales were made accessible to children in educational environments throughout the centuries, as is evident in the writings of Oliver Goldsmith and John Hayden, with popular versions produced by Charles Kingsley and Nathaniel Hawthorne (with Walter Crane) in the 19th century.

Norse Myths

These Scandinavian tales engage with complex ideas of creation, death and renewal, presenting the reader with nine worlds inhabited by strange and awesome beings. One of the first versions written for children was Annie and Eliza Keary's *Heroes of Asgard* (1857). As can be seen in the work of J.R.R. Tolkien, Norse myths had a major influence on the development of literature for children in the middle and latter part of the 20th century – a period that saw a remarkable range of fantasy texts produced for younger readers.

Arthurian Myths

In the latter part of the 19th century, at the height of the British Empire, writers such as Alfred W. Pollard – with illustrator Arthur Rackham – drew upon Arthurian myths to create books of valour and adventure, targeting boy readers in particular. This was also the period that became known as the Golden Age of children's books, when developments in printing technologies coincided with the emergence of brilliant illustrators and authors.

Irish Myths

Versions of Irish myths and legends, created specifically for children, first appeared during Ireland's cultural revival of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Illustrators and writers of the period include Beatrice Elvery, Maud Gonne, Violet Russell and James Stephens. The 12th-century *Book of Leinster*, held at Trinity College Library, was a source text for many retellings. Contemporary Irish authors, including Children's Laureate/Laureate na nÓg, Eoin Colfer, continue to incorporate elements of myth into their narratives.