

Purists may prefer an Homeric ethos, evoking the Iliad, the Odyssey, and the Homeric Hymns. Galloway, however, takes "relevance" as her watchword, and relates the story to what children nine to twelve are likely to identify with today. The Minotaur, far from being a man-eating monster justly slain by a heroic warrior, is a helpless child suffering from birth defects. The hero Daedalus (who might easily have been given sinister and wizardly characteristics) has the qualities of a modern scientific inventor, such as Nikola Tesla. In some areas, Minoan culture itself suggests a suitably relevant approach. The high position of women in Ancient Crete allows for an empowerment of woman theme.

Galloway retells these myths in the form of short biographical novels. This focuses the interest on the characters and their interaction, especially through dialogue. A major theme is parenting, including the disparate reactions of the King and Queen to the Minotaur, and Daedalus's own aloofness to his son Icarus. Icarus feels torn between his friendship for the Minotaur and his duty to his preoccupied father.

Galloway, a teacher, contrives to tell much about Minoan civilization in the course of the story. The characters live in the palace at Knossos and descriptive snapshots of design and decoration appear throughout. She blends in ideas from other ancient cultures and periods, however, and explains her approach in the "Afterword."

Cousineau's illustrations are based on Minoan designs and add atmosphere to the book. On the other hand, illustrations with more narrative qualities might be helpful for younger readers.

On the whole, I find Galloway's approach to retelling myth appropriate for younger readers. Although some of the wonder of "long ago and far away" is lost, it is useful to make connections to the past. Even university students need to learn about the continuity of past and present; and for children whose frame of reference includes "Goosebumps," "Spice World," and "The Baby Sitters' Club," this is even more important.

Hercules, A Hero for Today

My Hero, Hercules. Priscilla Galloway. Annick, 1999. 128 pp. \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55037-569-5.

Priscilla Galloway's new book in the Tales of Ancient Lands Series tells the story of the ancient Greek hero, Hercules, as seen through the eyes of a youngster named Jason. Jason's father wants his son to be a scribe, but the boy is attracted to the exploits of Hercules, and wants to be like him. Eventually (since he magically accompanies Hercules on some of his adventures), Jason understands that heroism has its down side too. He not only learns a more measured appreciation for his hero, but also he realizes that having faults does not necessarily make one less heroic.

Galloway's strategy is to make the past relevant by viewing traditional

stories through the eyes of a young character with whom young contemporary readers can identify. This approach is hardly new, since Euripides retold the myths in a “modern” way in fifth-century Athens. While, at best, this approach can give new perspectives on old tales, it always skirts the danger of turning stirring narratives into mediocre psychological dramas (something which not even Euripides always manages to avoid).

With such an archetypal action hero as Hercules, the thoughtful interpretation both raises interesting questions about heroism, and also seems to be genre-bending beyond the call of duty. I found my interest in the story flagging at times, and longed for a headlong narrative of derring-do in a world which was not “politically-correct” with sensitive men and empowered women. While we can use Hercules to point a moral, there is a lot to be said for a tale of sheer adventure. That, after all, is why these stories were told in the first place, and why they have lasted for three thousand years.

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Horse Books Good and Bad

Horses Forever. Lawrence Scanlan. Scholastic, Canada, 1998. 123 pp. \$5.99 paper. ISBN 0-590-12448-X. *Sienna's Rescue.* Nikki Tate. Sono Nis, 1998. 125 pp. \$5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55039-093-7. *Jessa Be Nimble, Rebel Be Quick.* Nikki Tate, Sono Nis, 1998. 138 pp. \$5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55039-088-0. *Glory Ride.* Tamara L. Williams. James, 1997. 103 pp. \$8.95 paper. ISBN 1-55028-602-1.

Horse books, both fiction and nonfiction, seem to be a perennial favourite with young girl readers. Each year a number of new titles appear.

Horses Forever, a nonfiction book by Lawrence Scanlan, provides the reader with a surprisingly interesting compendium of horse facts — from the gold-tipped oats that first-century Roman Emperor Caligula fed to his horse as proof of his affection, to the magic of twentieth-century horse whispering. It includes anecdotes about war horses, movie horses, sports horses, horses of myth and legend, a full colour section of photographs, and is prefaced with an excellent and moving introduction.

One can't help wishing that Scanlan had allowed the intimacy and warmth of this introduction to carry through into the rest of the book. Instead, for some reason, once the introduction is over, he suppresses emotion in favour of objectivity. One also can't help wishing he had provided more than just a far-too-brief mention of Canada's Big Ben. He undoubtedly has many fascinating anecdotes to tell, for he is the author of a complete book on the champion, and readers would have liked to share some of them. But the anecdotes that he does tell about other