

The hand that lies in the Aegean

By Ina Gilles

"The Hand of Zeus," by Katerina and Aegea Barclay, is a vibrant book for children. Aegea's original myth is simple, poetic, and reaches an archetypal sphere. Katerina's paintings capture the archetypal quality of the myth and throb with color, with Grecian grace.

As part of the local launch of their book, the mother-daughter team will be at the Queen Anne Bookstore, 1811 Queen Anne Ave. N., at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 17, for a reading and book signing.

Five years ago, the now 18-year-old Aegea was thinking about a creative writing assignment over her school break. As she sat with her mother on the beach in Hawaii, enjoying the warm weather and tropical surroundings — similar to their ancestral homeland, Greece — she began to imagine this myth. The story took shape during back-and-forth talks with her mother.

When Katerina was a child, "I looked at a map and would see the boot of Italy. Below, I would see a crooked hand." The hand was Greece, from whence Katerina's mother had come to the States after World War II for the chance of a better life. And so Aegea invented a story to explain how Greece became shaped like a crooked hand. "It's part geography lesson," Katerina said. "People will know where Greece is."

Magic and power, greed and love propel the story. Most haunting to me, however, are the moods of the god that Aegea and Katerina envision. From a pleased and gift-giving to a sad and resigned father, Zeus is a powerful but gentle being. Like the gods and goddesses of Greek myth, he feels emotions yet is classically aloof. He is detached like Buddha, full of love like Jesus. His moods are expressed through Katerina's paintings,

especially in his eyes.

In the Barclay home, three generations live together: Aegea, Katerina and Katerina's mother, Yaya — Greek for *grandmother*. Aegea feels "so lucky because my mom and grandmother are so very close. Without my grandmother's stories and Mom's about Greece, I couldn't have written this."

The Olympics were coming to Greece in five years. "Wouldn't it be wonderful to take this story and have it grow in time for the Olympics," they thought, "when the world will come to recognize the hand that lies in the Aegean." Over the five years that the book evolved, Katarina said she and her daughter "encouraged each other with different ideas between our imaginations."

The story shows Zeus gently letting his people know that he is in charge. In the process, 1,400 rebel Greeks become the 1,400 islands around Greece, which Aegea spells also as "eye-lands" — each looking back to its

Katerina said. As Americans who value their life in America, "we still have that desire to honor our heritage. It has been a special experience to understand a part of our past, and also to be able to honor the grandmother in this way." (The book is dedicated to her.)

When I suggested the myth is a metaphor for the state of the world today, with Greek wisdom Katerina pointed out that, in life, "greed always plays a part. Once we come to want a little too much, it seems to destroy some of the beauty of life."

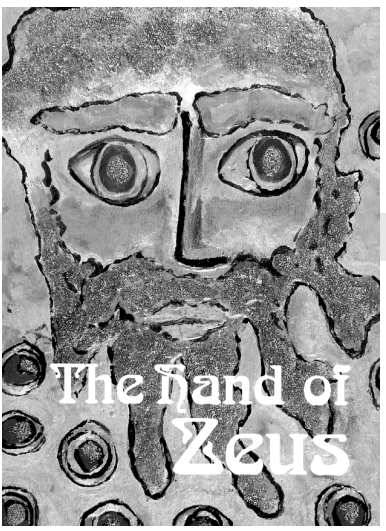
Katerina has visited Greece a few times, visits reflected in her paintings. She is not formally trained but has taken art courses, and these vibrant paintings are her first works. She describes Greece as "a rich, ancient, magical culture with so much history: the father of democracy, the father of medicine and the place where the Olympics began."

The Barclays self-published their book. Cooper Edens, Northwest author and illustrator of books loved by children and adults in the United States and elsewhere, helped get it printed in Hong Kong. He ensured that the reproductions of Katerina's pictures are of the highest quality on very fine paper.

"You won't find a finer paper or more vehement color array," he told me. "Her color palette is totally electric." He says she "sincerely felt her subject and translated it into paint in an expressionistic way. She is an innocent."

Edens said, "When I shopped the book around, people could not believe the story was not an old myth. It read to them like it was a thousands-of-years-old story."

Five years after they sat on a Hawaiian beach and began envisioning "The Hand of Zeus," Aegea and Katerina mailed the



finished book to Nikos Filaretos, president of the International Olympic Academy in Athens. He faxed them his congratulations and said their book will be at the library of the IOA, available for all Olympians.

In Greece, so the history that I learned goes, humans transitioned from viewing the universe as animate and full of gods and goddesses, to seeing it objectively. In very early Greece the cosmos was full of soul. Yet it was there that science began, which today treats the earth like matter without living essence, and which puts intellect over the capacity to imagine, to dream.

Science gave human beings more power over their surroundings. But despite dazzling achievements, when science competes with the imagination, it can lose. An evocative tale, imagined by an American descendant of the Greeks, explains the hand of Greece more hauntingly and memorably than any geological survey could do. And the ancient Greek worldview that all creation is alive from within imbues Katerina's paintings.

I wonder about this book's destiny. It has simplicity and power. I will never see a map of the Mediterranean again and not know how to find Greece: its hand is near Italy's boot. As a tale for children, a geography lesson, a way to encourage families to find and imagine stories from their own history, and as a myth that mirrors us to ourselves, "The Hand of Zeus" might become very popular. It will be interesting to watch its journey.

www.handofzeus.com

for other local events around the publication of "The Hand of Zeus"



homeland. In Greece, Katerina explained, there are necklaces and rings that have what is called a Greek eye, which is supposed to protect from all negative spirits. So for Aegea it seemed natural to make those islands into eyes.

"We are all connected to something a lot deeper through our families, our histories,"