Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: We Goddesses: Athena, Aphrodite, Hera by Marilee Heyer, Doris Orgel", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1089. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

Marilee Heyer , Doris Orgel

We Goddesses: Athena, Aphrodite, Hera

United States of America (2000)

TAGS: Aeneas Anchises Aphrodite Athena Hephaestus Hera Heracles Medusa Pegasus Perseus Trojan War Typhon / Typhoeus / Typhaon Zeus





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	We Goddesses: Athena, Aphrodite, Hera
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States of America, Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2000
First Edition Details	Doris Orgel, *We Goddesses: Athena, Aphrodite, Hera*. New York, DK Inc., 1999, 112 pp.
ISBN	9780751372229 (the review refers to the 2000 edition)
Genre	Myths
Target Audience	Children (adolescents)
Author of the Entry	Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@biu.ac.il
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Creators



Marilee Heyer (Illustrator)

Marilee Heyer is an American illustrator and artist. She holds a B.A. with Honors from the Art Center College of Design, Los Angeles. In addition to book illustration, she has done fashion illustration and scene design for various customers.

Source:

Official website (accessed: August 2, 2020).

Bio prepared by Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@biu.ac.il



Doris Orgel , b. 1929 (Author)

Doris Orgel was born in Vienna, Austria to a Jewish father. Her family escaped Vienna in 1938 and went to America where she attended school and college. She is a full-time children's author and also translated children books from German to English. She currently lives in New York City. In 1998, her book, *The Devil in Vienna* received a Phoenix award.

Sources:

Bio at the univie.ac.at (accessed: October 4, 2017).

Profile at the penguinrandomhouse.com (accessed: December 29,

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2016).

Profile at the muse.jhu.edu (accessed: December 29, 2016).

Profile at the c-span.org (accessed: December 29, 2016).

Profile on Goodreads (accessed: December 29, 2016).

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Additional information

Summary

This book provides first-person stories narrated by Athena, Aphrodite and Hera. Each of the goddesses tells of her birth, childhood and later years. The book contains an introduction on the ancient Greek gods, and the life of mortal girls and women in ancient Greece. In the end there is an epilogue, in which the reader is welcomed to a banquet of the gods, followed by a presentation of the goddesses in ancient art, sources for the myths (both ancient and modern) and an index.

The narrated myths are: Athena: her birth, childhood with Triton, her friend Pallas, her coming to Olympus, her heroes, her choice to remain a virgin, Perseus and Medusa, birth of Pegasus, her rivalry with Poseidon and his pursuit of Demeter. Aphrodite: her birth, journeys to Cythera and Cyprus, arrival to Olympus, her marriage to Hephaestus, her lovers, wedding of Thetis and Peleus, Adonis, her love for Anchises and the birth of Aeneas, judgment of Paris, Trojan war. Hera: her being swallowed by Cronus, her encounter with Zeus, his previous and future lovers (for example Alcmene), her golden apple tree, her marriage and wedding night, asking Tiresias whether the bride or groom enjoy love better, Typhaon, Io, Heracles, the battle with the giants and how Heracles saved her from a giant and was made into a god.

Analysis

This book aims to empower its adolescent female readers. Since sexual acts are mentioned, yet not too explicitly, (as well as the enjoyment of lovemaking), it is directed not at young readers but at older ones.

After briefly explaining the origin of the Greek gods, the author focuses on the life of girls and women in ancient Greece and how the story of Pandora and the view of her as the source of all evil has influenced the treatment of women: “she passed her vileness down to the entire female race. Men, beware, was Hesiod’s warning; keep your wives and daughters in their places, under strict control.” (p. xvii). The author moves on to discuss moral values of the ancients vs. modern ones and the ambivalent nature of Zeus, who is a dominant character in the book. She states that following a conversation with three adolescent girls, she decided to devote this book to the goddesses. For the author, there is a paradox, in that “ancient Greece

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honoured its goddesses and treated women not much better than slaves" [p. xxvii]. The author hopes that in the future women will be regarded as equals and misogyny will fade away. She specifically chose Athena, Aphrodite and Hera since in her opinion, they "represent contrasting styles of being female" (p. xxvii) and their stories are also interlinked.

Each goddess tells her story to the readers. Since the emphasis is on empowering girls and women, the focus of the stories is on how each goddess faced challenges and overcame them, especially during her childhood. The myths are accordingly altered to emphasis the strength and goodness of the goddesses.

Regarding Athena, the myth of Arachne is not mentioned, and Medusa is portrayed as a seductive woman. Athena says that "there lay Medusa consorting with her sea-god lover, none other than Poseidon, on *my* altar." (p. 14). Hence the furious Athena punished her for her crime and turned her into a hideous monster. Medusa is described as deliberately consorting with her lover in Athena's temple thus desecrating it, despite the fact that according to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Medusa was raped by Poseidon in the shrine. She may have been wrong in boasting her beauty but not, according to this version, in deliberately defiling the shrine. In a book aimed at empowering women it may appear odd that the author, while praising Athena, demeans Medusa, who can be seen as a symbol of victim blaming.

Athena then tells how she helped Athens but bemoans the wrongs which remained in the city especially the poor treatment of girls and women. She complains about this to Zeus yet he disregards her concerns and tell her to leave the humans to live as they wish. Hence historical reality is mingled with the myth, making the gods aware of human's follies.

In the story of Aphrodite, the author links the historical reality of ancient Greece with the hierarchy of Olympus. Although Aphrodite was created from foam, Zeus wishes to adopt her as his daughter and she explains, "daughters, even goddesses, are in their father's power. Zeus thought that as my father he could more readily control me, tame me…" (p. 36). Hence Zeus and Aphrodite's relations are likened to the strict patriarchy of a regular ancient Greek family. Yet Aphrodite, unlike a mortal daughter, is a powerful goddess, therefore Zeus could not control her. It appears that Aphrodite's job is mainly

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supplying females, both mortal and immortal, for Zeus' escapades. Aphrodite resents Zeus for not granting her the gold apple, hence she "curses" him with mortal companions who bear him mortal children, whose death saddens and angers Zeus. Yet Zeus retaliates by using Eros and making Aphrodite fall in love with mortal Anchises.

Regarding Hera, she is portrayed as a victim of Zeus' infidelity, while she upholds the true meaning of marriage. The author resents the fact that Hera is often described in myth as jealous and vindictive when Zeus is in the wrong (as she notes in the introduction, p. xxvi), hence she lets her tell her story so that the readers can identify with her more and feel sympathetic towards her. It appears as if her world revolves around Zeus entirely. Her only "individual" action is the birth of Typhaon, which epitomises her bitterness and resentment in its monstrous form.

Hera describes Athena's birth from Zeus' head as a bitter moment for the goddesses. "we goddesses gave our congratulations, but with restraint. Bearing children, after all, had been our gender's one great glory in gods' eyes. Was this now lost?" (p. 75). The other goddesses blame Hera for not wanting to bear a child. Once more we see how historical reality enters the narrative. There are three powerful virgin goddesses in the Greek Olympian pantheon (Athena, Artemis, Hestia), therefore bearing children could not have been the goddesses' only merits in the eyes of the other gods.

As with the alteration of myths in Athena's narrative, Hera's famous jealousy towards Heracles is almost obscured. She mentions the snakes in his crib but not making him kill his family. Furthermore, she explains that his birth had a special reason, for, since Heracles had to fight monsters to prove that he is a Hero, so Hera provided him with the opportunities to prove his worth. Yet Zeus reveals to her that Heracles was born to save the gods from the giants; it was all Fate's plan and not Zeus' lust.

To conclude, this book aims to emphasize the power of the goddesses and show that they are equal to the gods and deserve a book especially dedicated to them (the author mentions that she is unaware of any book in English which focuses solely on the goddesses). The author positions herself in the long line of classical receptions, "every generation can only tell the ancient myths anew out of its own needs and concerns, and in its own writing styles…I…gave myself permission to go ahead and give my goddesses their say." [p. xxiv]. Her love of

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	Greek mythology made the author want to write about them and carry their story to the next generations, and she wove her own women-centric viewpoint into them as she thought fit. In the epilogue, when the reader is invited to the banquet of the gods, she (I assume the author refers to both genders but particularly to girls) receives gifts from the goddesses. From Aphrodite a golden thread with the magic of her girdle, from Athena, vision, understanding and skill and from Hera – mortality. The reader may have wished for immortality yet Hera's gift was to not make this wish come true so the reader may cherish his/her life the most.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aeneas Anchises Aphrodite Athena Hephaestus Hera Heracles Medusa Pegasus Perseus Trojan War Typhon / Typhoeus / Typhaon Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Death Emotions Family Love Magic Revenge

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