Elżbieta Olechowska, "Entry on: Disaster at Pompeii [Catastrophe à Pompéi] by Glen Chapron, Hélène Montardre ", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1233. Entry version as of November 07, 2026.

Glen Chapron , Hélène Montardre

Disaster at Pompeii [Catastrophe à Pompéi]

France (2013)

TAGS: Architecture Herculaneum Loreius Misenum Pliny the Elder Pliny the Younger Pompeii Roman Art Roman Education Roman History Roman Navy Stabiae Venus Vesuvius





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

General information	
Title of the work	Disaster at Pompeii [Catastrophe à Pompéi]
Country of the First Edition	France
Country/countries of popularity	France and French-speaking countries
Original Language	French
First Edition Date	2013
First Edition Details	Hélène Montardre, *Catastrophe à Pompéi* [Disaster at Pompeii], ill. Glen Chapron, *Petites histoires de l'HISTOIRE*, 3. Paris: Nathan, 2015, 61 pp.
ISBN	9782092558614
Genre	Historical fiction
Target Audience	Children (12 years +)
Author of the Entry	Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Lisa Maurice, Bar-Ilan University, lisa.maurice@biu.ac.il Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaounde 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Creators



Glen Chapron , b. 1982
(Illustrator)

Born in western Brittany (Finistère, France), Glen Chapron currently lives in Nantes on the Loire River, in Upper Brittany. He attended École Estienne in Paris learning printmaking, then moved to Strasbourg to study illustration at the School of Decorative Arts. In his artistic activity, he focuses on drawing comic books and illustrating children's literature for a variety of French publishers, such as Nathan, Casterman, Sarbacane, Glénat, Bayard, Milan or Flammarion.

Chapron illustrated several novels for children written by Hélène Montardre, including *Vercingétorix contre Jules César* et *Catastrophe à Pompéi*.

Sources:

Official website (accessed: June 18, 2021).

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Profile at glenat.com (accessed: June 18, 2021).

Profile at bayard-editions.com (accessed: June 18, 2021).

Profile at chocolat-jeunesse.com (accessed: June 18, 2021).

Profile at babelio.com (accessed: June 18, 2021).

Bio prepared by Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com

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Portrait, courtesy of Univers Jeunesse–Nathan–Syros–Pocket Jeunesse.

Hélène Montardre , b. 1954
(Author)

Born in 1954 in Montreuil, in a family with origins in the Forez Mountains. Because of her father's occupation (the writer Georges Montforez, 1921–1974), during her childhood and adolescence she frequently moved and lived in many different places: Saint-Étienne, Marvejols, Nantes, Loudun, Issoire. She studied English at the University of Clermont-Ferrand, where she obtained her PhD (*L'image des personnages féminins dans la littérature de jeunesse française contemporaine de 1975 à 1995*. Lille: Presses universitaires du Septentrion) in 1999. For the last forty years or so, she has lived with her family in the Haute-Garonne, Occitanie. During the last decade, she wrote a number of books based on a variety of Greek myths, with illustrations by Nicholas Duffaut; the books appeared in two series published by Nathan and called: *Petites histoires de la mythologie* and *Contes et légendes jeunesse*.

She has written over fifty books, mainly for children and received many literary awards:

- 1995 2nd prize for roman jeunesse du Ministère de la Jeunesse et des Sports;
- 1998 Price Livrami of the city of Pithiviers;
- 2003–2004 Price Tatoulu ;
- 2004 Price Livre, mon ami, New Caledonia;
- 2007 Price of the City of Cherbourg-Octeville, XVIIIe Livre d'Or des Jeunes Lecteurs Valenciennois, Price Ruralivres en Pas-de-Calais, Price Latulu des collégiens du Maine-et-Loire;
- 2007 and 2008 Price of Readers' Spring, Narbonne, 2007–2008 Literary price of the Montagnes d'Auvergne;
- 2008 Price Jasmin, Agen, Price Trégor ados, Price Livrentête Culture et Bibliothèques Pour Tous, category Junior Novel.

Chronological bibliography of Hélène Montardre's books related to classical antiquity

Non-fiction

- Hélène Montardre. *L'Empire romain, Les Essentiels Junior*. Toulouse: Milan, 2004.

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- Hélène Montardre. *La Grèce ancienne, Les Encyclopes.* Toulouse: Milan, 2004.
- Hélène Montardre. *La mythologie grecque, Les Encyclopes*. Toulouse: Milan, 2008.

Series *Petites histoires de la mythologie*

- Hélène Montardre, Nicolas Duffaut, ill. *Dans le ventre du cheval de Troie*. Paris: Nathan, 2010.
- Hélène Montardre, Nicolas Duffaut, ill. *Orphée aus Enfers*, Paris: Nathan, 2013.
- Hélène Montardre, Nicolas Duffaut, ill. *Les douze travaux d'Hercule*. Paris: Nathan, 2011.
- Hélène Montardre, Nicolas Duffaut, ill. *Zeus le roi des dieux*. Paris: Nathan, 2013.
- Hélène Montardre, Nicolas Duffaut, ill. *Héphaïstos et l'amour d'Aphrodite*. Paris: Nathan, 2013.
- Hélène Montardre, Nicolas Duffaut, ill. *Thésée contre le Minotaure*. Paris :Nathan, 2013.

Series *Contes et légendes jeunesse*

- Hélène Montardre, Nicolas Duffaut, ill. *Persée et la Gorgone*. Paris: Nathan, 2010.
- Hélène Montardre, Nicolas Duffaut, ill. *Jason et la Toison d'or*. Paris: Nathan, 2011.
- Hélène Montardre, Nicolas Duffaut, ill. *Le labyrinthe de Dédale*. Paris: Nathan, 2011.
- Hélène Montardre, Nicolas Duffaut, ill. *Ulysse et le Cyclope*. Paris: Nathan, 2011.
- Hélène Montardre, Nicolas Duffaut, ill. *L'enlèvement de Perséphone*. Paris: Nathan, 2012.
- Hélène Montardre, Nicolas Duffaut, ill. *Achille le guerrier.* Paris: Nathan, 2012.
- Hélène Montardre, Nicolas Duffaut, ill. *Pégase, l'indomptable*. Paris: Nathan, 2012.
- Hélène Montardre, Nicolas Duffaut, ill. *Prométhée, le voleur de feu*. Paris: Nathan, 2012.
- Hélène Montardre, Nicolas Duffaut, ill. *Apollon, le dieu dauphin*. Paris: Nathan, 2015.
- Hélène Montardre, Nicolas Duffaut, ill. *Les monstres de l'Odyssée*. Paris: Nathan, 2016.
- Hélène Montardre, Nicolas Duffaut, ill. *Hermès Le dieu aux*

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mille dons. Paris: Nathan, 2017.

Source:

Website of the Maison des écrivains et de la littérature (accessed: June 26, 2018).

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Additional information

Summary

Like all volumes in the series, this one begins with a section *The adventure begins...* setting up the scene of the novel by providing answers to the basic narrative questions: when, where, "so what", and who.

A teenage boy, Caius Plinius Caecilius Secundus, who lives in Misenum with his mother and uncle, Pliny the Elder, a writer and also commander of the Roman fleet stationed in the port, frequently visits his friend Loreius in Pompeii, across the bay. Loreius spends lots of time training in many sports, but Caius is more interested in books; he patiently waits until his friend completes his exercises so they can talk and play together. When he meets his friend's lovely sister Corellia, he falls in love with her. She resembles a mural of Venus painted in a house next door. Caius gives Corellia, who reciprocates his feelings, a golden pendant with an image of Venus engraved on a black stone. She promises to wear it always.

One day, Caius is working in Misenum on an essay assigned by his uncle, when a strangely shaped cloud appears in the sky above Vesuvius. The uncle prepares to leave on a small ship to observe the phenomenon, but an urgent appeal for help arrives from people in the vicinity of Pompeii apparently bombarded by hot pumice raining from the volcano. The admiral leaves Misenum with a large number of ships, which he orders to cross the bay and to save the people affected by the eruption. Earthquakes begin to be strongly felt even in Misenum and a dark, enormous cloud gradually extends over the sky. Caius flees the crumbling house with his mother, trying to reach the safer area of fields beyond the town. The heavy and thick cloud, full of hot ashes, reaches Misenum. The mother and son try to find a refuge but the mother weakens. They see fires starting in the town and unable to flee far away, stay huddled in a hollow, trying to breathe, with their heads protected by the mother's veil. The fires, incredibly, do not reach them and the hot cloud gradually dissipates.

Eventually, they return home. The house is almost intact, the servants also come back and the cleanup begins. They await the return of Pliny the Elder, but instead, a friend who sailed with him, comes back with a horrific story of death and total destruction. The uncle perished and so did almost all the people across the bay, Herculaneum and Pompeii have been buried by the volcano. Caius does not want to believe it and

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refuses to mourn Corellia and Loreius.

When it finally becomes possible, Caius takes his usual route to Pompeii. Indeed, nothing is left. Some other people come to search for their families and friends. Among them, he finds Loreius with an empty expression. The boy is shock-shelled. After a while, he recognizes Caius and tells him that his whole family are dead, Corellia probably too, but he is not entirely sure. It is still much too dangerous to try and reach their house. Many days later, Caius comes back to what used to be Pompeii and continues looking for Corellia. Where her house stood, he catches a young thief holding in his fist the pendant Caius gave to the girl. Devastated, racked by uncontrollable sobs, he curses the mountain, the ashes, and the rocks under his feet. He vowes never to return.

The book – according to the series template – ends with a chapter providing facts about the ancient sources, historical characters, and the archaeological excavations of Herculaneum and Pompeii, which began in the 18th century and are still not completed. In a Q&A format, this final section of the book provides data in easy to read, short explanations: where is Pompeii, who is Caius, when did Vesuvius erupt destroying Herculaneum and Pompeii, did the house of Loreius and Corellia really exist?

Analysis

Tacitus, when writing his *Histories*, asked his friend and contemporary Pliny the Younger to describe the death of his uncle during the eruption of Vesuvius he witnessed himself from Misenum, on the other side of the bay. In his letter 6, 16 and later, in the letter 6, 20, Pliny provided answers to Tacitus' questions.

Helen Montardre tells her version of the disaster, in detail following the content of both letters, including the characters mentioned there but most of them otherwise unknown. For instance, Rectina, the wife of Tascius who appealed to Pliny the Younger for help in the evacuation, or Pomponianus, the eye witness to Pliny the Elder's demise whom some scholars attempted but failed to identify as the same person as Tascius (see Jones, 2001, 37–39 refuting Sherwin-White, 1966*).

The name Corellia is known from Pliny the Younger's *Letters* (*Epist.* 4,17,1; 7, 11,1), but it is not Corellia from Pompeii. According to the

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Roman custom of naming children, a Corellia could not have been a sister of Loreius from Pompeii, Pliny's athletic friend in the novel. The house, that serves as setting to the Montardre's novel, used to be called House of Loreius Tiburtinus. The name was inscribed there in two electoral graffiti and indicated two different people, a Loreius and a Tiburtinus. The owner of the house was in fact a certain Octavius Quartio (Nappo, 1998**).

What Montardre brings to Pliny the Younger's tale is the love story and the perspective of a teenager who spends an enchanting summer at the feet of a volcano. His fictional friend Loreius and his, just as fictional, lovely sister Corellia transform the dramatic events into a moving and personal story of lives full of dreams of an exciting future tragically cut short. The novel shows also to readers a glimpse of everyday existence in the Bay of Naples close to two thousand years ago, a busy and prosperous town, its public buildings, streets, private homes, people. This is an image based on authentic testimonies and archaeological evidence of a reality frozen in time by a natural disaster and uncovered many centuries later.

The portrayal of Pliny the Elder follows the letters of his nephew to Tacitus. A stern adoptive father, devoted to Roman virtues, an admiral courageous to excess, he was mindful of the image he projected to others. Pliny the Younger appears also true to what the ancient sources say, even if quite young (18 years), he is already serious about study and fascinated by the natural world. Corellia attracts him not only by her beauty but also by her love of books.

The disaster at Pompeii is a captivating and moving story developed often in films and television (see the database). The still ongoing excavations and attempts at deciphering papyri found there keep the story alive in the minds of people of all ages. The fact that the main ancient source of the catastrophy is a teenager makes the topic natural for a novel for young people.

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* Nicholas F. Jones, "Pliny the Younger's Vesuvius Letters", *Classical World* 95 (2002): 31–48; A. N. Sherwin-White, *The Letters of Pliny: A Historical and Social Commentary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966.

** Salvatore Nappo, *Pompeii: Guide to the Lost City*, London:

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	Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1998.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Architecture Herculaneum Loreius Misenum Pliny the Elder Pliny the Younger Pompeii Roman Art Roman Education Roman History Roman Navy Stabiae Venus Vesuvius
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Emotions Friendship Love Nature Sport Teenagers

Further Reading

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Commentary, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966.

Addenda	Genre: Famous historical events and profiles of famous historical figures for children.

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