Sarah F. Layzell, "Entry on: Show Us Who You Are by Elle McNicoll", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2022). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1497. Entry version as of November 07, 2026.

Elle McNicoll

Show Us Who You Are

United Kingdom (2021)

TAGS: Cerberus Demeter Hades Kore (Persephone) Odyssey Orpheus Penelope Persephone





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

General information	
Title of the work	Show Us Who You Are
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2021
First Edition Details	Elle McNicoll, *Show Us Who You Are*. London: Knights Of, 2021, 310 pp.
ISBN	9781913311131
Official Website	Ellemcnicoll.com (accessed: August 3, 2022).
Genre	Fiction, Novels
Target Audience	Children (Middle Grade: 8–12)
Author of the Entry	Sarah F. Layzell, University of Cambridge / Independent Researcher, sarahlayzellhardstaff@gmail.com
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Creators



Elle McNicoll , b. 1992
(Author)

Elle McNicoll is a neurodivergent author originally from Scotland, now living in London. McNicoll holds a BA in Creative Writing and an MA in Publishing: for her Master's dissertation, she wrote about the lack of neurodivergent #ownvoices publishing. McNicoll's debut novel, *A Kind of Spark*, was published in 2020 and features a young autistic character campaigning for a memorial to victims of witch trials in her hometown. *A Kind of Spark* was Blackwell's Children's Book of the Year and was nominated for the Carnegie medal. *Show Us Who You Are* is McNicoll's second novel to be published by Knights Of, a publisher dedicated to diversity in children's publishing.

Sources:

Official Website (accessed: August 3, 2022).

Elle McNicoll at knigstof.media (accessed: August 3, 2022).

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Additional information

Summary

Show Us Who You Are tells the story of Cora Byers, an autistic twelve-year-old mourning the loss of her mother and dealing with bullies – both classmates and teachers – at school. Through her brother's work at the mysterious Pomegranate Institute she meets Adrien, son of Pomegranate's wealthy owner Magnus Hawkins. Cora and Adrien, who has ADHD, quickly become best friends.

Meanwhile, Cora learns more about the work that is being done at Pomegranate to create holograms of people (called 'Grams') so that their loved ones can come and visit them after they die. Against her father's wishes and Adrien's advice, Cora finds herself drawn into the Institute's work, agreeing to be interviewed by the glamorous Dr Gold, who tells Cora that she wants to understand more about autism. A shocking turn of events in Chapter 13 leaves Cora more determined than ever to complete her work with Dr Gold, but she starts to realise that ulterior motives may be at play.

When it becomes clear that Dr Gold is only interested in neurodivergence in order to erase its traces from her Grams, Cora turns whistleblower, exposing the Pomegranate Institute as a eugenicist endeavor. As the novel comes to a close, Cora's activism has sparked a wider campaign against eugenics. After a whirlwind summer of media appearances, she prepares to return to everyday life.

Analysis

Show Us Who You Are uses several elements of the Persephone myth, emphasising one of the novel's key themes: death and rebirth. The name 'Cora' is related to 'Kore', another name for Persephone, and the name of the Pomegranate Institute is a reference to the pomegranate seeds Persephone is tricked into eating, trapping her in a cycle of return to the Underworld. In their final conversation near the end of the novel, Cora asks Dr Gold if the name choice was deliberate: "Why did you call it Pomegranate?... Was it because of the myth? Fruit of the dead?" (p. 300). In this scene, Cora is echoing the words of her own unfinished Gram, who also refers briefly to the story of Penelope waiting for Odysseus: "They're unpicking the tapestry." (p. 208) In this case, the tapestry could be a reference to authentic human life and experience, with Dr Gold and her associates editing

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and remaking people in ways they deem desirable.

Holly Blackford has written about the many reinterpretations of the Persephone myth in children's literature, for example in the *Harry Potter* books, the *Twilight* books and *Coraline*. Many of the common themes identified by Blackford are also explored by McNicoll in *Show Us*, including the descent into a fantasy world, coming of age through gaining new knowledge, and mother-daughter relationships. Cora's mother has died before the beginning of the novel, and Cora's grief is a key driver of her decision to get involved in the work being done at Pomegranate. Other parent-child relationships are important in the novel too, as with Adrien's fraught relationship with his father, who does not accept him as he is.

As well as the parallels between Cora and Persephone, the character Adrien's name is reminiscent of Hades. This is reinforced through several plot points and details: Cora meets Adrien in his gated garden, and Adrien's dog is called Cerby, a reference to Cerberus, the guard dog of the gates of the Underworld. Cora and Adrien's friendship is also associated with transitional spaces like the meeting rooms and waiting rooms of the Pomegranate Institute, and travelling together by car. These spaces recall Persephone's journeys to and from the Underworld.

The repositioning of Hades as a sympathetic character aligns with modern interpretations of the Persephone myth in children's literature. Blackford's book looks at examples of appealing boy characters whose function in literature is to tempt girls into death, like the *Twilight* saga's Edward Cullen and the *Harry Potter* series' Tom Riddle (the young Voldemort). What Adrien does differently to these characters is to help Cora accept the finality of death, including the death of her mother. Cora is given her own key to Adrien's garden and returns by choice rather than the sense of compulsion that is present in many of Blackford's examples.

What McNicoll achieves here is a retelling of the Persephone myth that encourages readers to question the idea that a Hades character is necessarily monstrous. When asked by journalists if the people running the Pomegranate Institute are monsters, Cora responds:

"There's no such thing as monsters… We've just got to stop making monsters out of each other. Out of people who seem different. Monsters only exist if you don't ask questions. If you let your

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	imagination make up a story that isn't true." (p. 298). This bolsters the novel's overt messaging questioning the marginalisation of neurodivergence and highlighting the existence and agency of neurodivergent people throughout history and in literature, for example through references to Alan Turing and Hans Christian Andersen's *The Ugly Duckling*. Although the novel's setting is recognisable as London, there are a couple of details that show that we are in the near future. References to limitations on air travel and characters' inability to see the stars evoke a realistic unfolding of the climate emergency. These two details both relate to the sky, highlighting the relationship between above and below that we also see in Persephone's journeys and in other imagery used throughout this novel. Cora describes her own journey in a way that McNicoll has talked about in an interview as being like Orpheus: "Once you're walking the road, you just have to make sure that you never glance back" (p. 302). McNicoll has also talked about the influence of the pandemic on the novel (in Carpenter, 2021): in recent months of cycling in and out of lockdown, the Persephone myth has been especially resonant for many, and it seems apt indeed that this novel was published in the spring.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Cerberus Demeter Hades Kore (Persephone) Odyssey Orpheus Penelope Persephone
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adolescence Appearances Coming of age Communication Conflict Death Disability Fairy tale references Family Freedom Friendship Future Gaining understanding Historical figures Humanity Identity Individuality Integrity Intellect Journeys Justice Life Loss Memory Morality Parents (and children) Peers Reincarnation Relationships Science Social class Soul Subjectivity Transformation Truth and lies
Further Reading	Blackford, Holly V., *The Myth of Persephone in Girls' Fantasy Literature*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2012.

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Carpenter, Caroline, "Springboard: Elle McNicoll, *Show Us Who You Are*", *The Bookseller* March 10, 2021. https://www.thebookseller.com/insight/springboard-elle-mcnicoll-show-us-who-you-are-1240627, (accessed: April 5, 2021, no longer available).

Roberts, John, ed., "'ersephonē/Korē" in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Classical World,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007 (accessed: August 3, 2022).

Show Us Who You Are: Interview with ND author Elle McNicoll, YouTube video, added by Yo Samdy Sam, 8 March 2021 (accessed: August 3, 2022).

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