Agnieszka Maciejewska, "Entry on: Cleopatra: Discover the World of Cleopatra through the Diary of Her Handmaiden, Nefret by Adèle Geras, Mark P. Robertson", peer-reviewed by Elżbieta Olechowska and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/252. Entry version as of November 11, 2026.

Adèle Geras , Mark P. Robertson

Cleopatra: Discover the World of Cleopatra through the Diary of Her Handmaiden, Nefret

United Kingdom (2007)

TAGS: Alexander Helios Caesar Caesarion Cleopatra Selene II Cleopatra VII Egypt Iras (Handmaid) Mark Antony Octavian Rome





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

General information	
Title of the work	Cleopatra: Discover the World of Cleopatra through the Diary of Her Handmaiden, Nefret
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2007
First Edition Details	Adèle Geras, *Cleopatra: Discover the World of Cleopatra through the Diary of Her Handmaiden, Nefret*. Ill. M. P. Robertson, London: Kingfisher, 2007.
ISBN	0753413590
Genre	Diary fiction, Fictional autobiography, Illustrated works, Instructional and educational works
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Creators



Courtesy of the author.

Adèle Geras , b. 1944
(Author)

Adèle Geras was born in Jerusalem in 1944. Owing to the fact that her father was in the Colonial Service, she travelled a lot and lived in several countries (e.g. Cyprus, Tanzania, Nigeria etc.) when she was a child. She attended Roedean School in Brighton and later graduated from St. Hilda's College, Oxford, in 1966. She has been a full-time writer since 1976.

Adèle Geras is a prolific writer – she has penned more than ninety books for children, young adults and adults. *The Girls in the Velvet Frame* was her first full-length novel. She is best known for books such as *Troy*, *Ithaka*, *Happy Ever After*, *Silent Snow*, *Secret Snow* and *A Thousand Yards of Sea*. She has received prizes for poetry and two of her books: The Sydney Taylor Book Award for *My Grandmother's Stories* and the National Jewish Book Award for *Golden Windows.*

She lives in Great Shelford, near Cambridge. Her late husband, Norman Geras (1943–2013), was a Marxist political theorist based at the University of Manchester. One of her two daughters, Sophie Hannah, is also a published author, writing crime fiction and poetry.

Bio prepared by Agnieszka Maciejewska, Univesity of Warsaw, agnieszka.maciejewska@student.uw.edu.pl and Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com

Questionnaire

1. What drew you to writing about Classical Antiquity and what challenges did you face in selecting, representing, or adapting particular myths or stories?

I have always been interested in the Classics and knew the stories of Homer and the Greek myths from a very young age. I've written three novels set in Classical Antiquity: *Troy*, *Ithaka* and *Dido*.

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2. Why do you think classical / ancient myths, history, and literature continue to resonate with young audiences?

For one reason: they are amazingly exciting stories. About things that matter and emotions that we all still feel.

3. Do you have a background in classical education (Latin or Greek at school or classes at the University?) What sources are you using? Scholarly work? Wikipedia? Are there any books that made an impact on you in this respect?

I did Latin at school till age 16. But I grew up with translations of the myths and also later read Homer in translation. I don't use much research. I reread the *Iliad* for *Troy*, the *Odyssey* for *Ithaka* and Vergil's *Aeneid* Book four for *Dido*. For *Cleopatra* I had a research assistant appointed by the publisher called Alison Stanley and she was wonderful and provided me with all the relevant facts and she was also my editor on *Cleopatra*.

4. How concerned were you with "accuracy" or "fidelity" to the original?

I wanted it to be true to the spirit of Homer and I didn't knowingly alter things BUT invented my own characters and made up the story that they were involved in. Accuracy was sometimes not so good. I have cooks using LEMONS in *Ithaca*, to baste the meat they are cooking and it seems lemons were unknown in Classical Greece!

5. Are you planning any further forays into classical material?

I would love to do more but only if someone commissioned me to write such a novel. I am too old now to be writing novels which I'm not sure someone will want to publish.

Prepared by Agnieszka Maciejewska, Univesity of Warsaw,

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Mark P. Robertson , b. 1965
(Illustrator)

M. P. Robertson, writer and illustrator, was born in 1965. He has always dreamt of becoming an artist so he went to Hounslow Borough College to study graphic design. After graduation he studied Illustration at Kingston University. He graduated in 1988 and worked as illustrator for various publishers. His first book *Seven Ways to Catch the Moo*n was published by Frances Lincoln in 1999.

Sources:

Official website (accessed: June 25, 2018)

Facebook's profile (accessed: June 25, 2018)

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Additional information

Summary

Cleopatra VII, one of the greatest queens in history, lived in Greco-Roman times in Egypt. When the Queen is described at the beginning of the book, the reader can recognise an almost direct quotation from Plutarch of Chaeronea*. The narrator is a ten-year-old girl named Nefret. She goes to the Queen's palace to work as her handmaiden. This allows the reader to learn about the customs and everyday life in Hellenistic Alexandria. Nefret meets Cleopatra when she is mourning Caesar (after the Ides of March) and her husband – Ptolemy. She follows the Queen to Tars, where they meet Mark Antony - Cleopatra's future lover. The little girl witnesses the legendary feast on the Queen's ship; the account is filtered through a child's point of view. Nefret watches how the love between her Queen and Mark Antony deepens. The little servant also tells us that Cleopatra is carrying her lover's child, and it makes her furious when Mark Antony must go to Rome to join his wife, Octavia. When Cleopatra learns that Nefret's cat is also pregnant, her mood changes; the presence of the cat, strongly connected to ancient Egyptian culture and religion, is symbolic. When Cleopatra gives birth to twins, Nefret's cat has little kittens. Nefret is going to be married to her best friend, Rami, and leaves the Queen. It is the end of the diary, and the reader is left with the information that Nefret's cousin Iras will take her place in the palace, and the reader knows that when the time comes, she will die with Cleopatra in her tomb.

* Plut. *Ant.* 27

Analysis

Cleopatra is a great example of how to tell a story subtly using the perspective of a child. When children read *Cleopatra*, they learn about Cleopatra VII, the culture of Hellenistic Alexandria, Egypt and Rome, and the most important historical events related to the Queen. Apart from Nefret's diary, the book offers a reference appendix with information about Cleopatra after Nefret has left her service. The appendix includes short descriptions of Alexandria, the Ptolemaic dynasty and the culture of ancient Egypt.

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Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Alexander Helios Caesar Caesarion Cleopatra Selene II Cleopatra VII Egypt Iras (Handmaid) Mark Antony Octavian Rome
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Child's view Historical figures Relationships

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