Susan Deacy, "Entry on: Three Cheers for Women by Marcia Dorothy Williams", peer-reviewed by Elżbieta Olechowska and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/671. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

Marcia Dorothy Williams

Three Cheers for Women

United Kingdom (2017)

TAGS: Boudicca Celts Cleopatra VII Egypt Iceni Roman Britain Roman Egypt Roman Empire





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

General information	
Title of the work	Three Cheers for Women
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2017
First Edition Details	Marcia Dorothy Williams, *Three Cheers for Women.* London: Walker 2017, 48 pp.
ISBN	9781406379976
Genre	Biographies
Target Audience	Children (esp. of primary school age)
Author of the Entry	Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk
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Creators



Marcia Dorothy Williams , b. 1945
(Author, Illustrator)

Marcia Williams is a British author and illustrator. As a young child, she lived in several different countries with her mother (a writer), her stepfather (a diplomat) and her nanny. She was then sent to the UK where she attended several boarding schools. After working at several jobs, including as an interior designer and a nursery school teacher, she studied art at Richmond upon Thames College in Twickenham, London. She later went on to do an MA in Children's Literature at the University of Surrey, Roehampton in London. Williams is the author-illustrator of a number of books for children on mythological, historical and biblical topics including a number of retellings of classical myths and retellings of works of Shakespeare and Dickens. She began retelling classical myths to entertain her son when he was young. She continues to find out what entertains her young readers via regular visits to schools. She has won several awards including the UKLA Children's Book Award and The English 4–11 Picture Book Award.

According to the *Brief Biographies* entry on Williams, her 'mother, also a writer, had a passion for books, and when the two were together she would often read her daughter excerpts from classics and mythology. "I found Marcel Proust and the Greek myths a little hard going," the author recalled. "I was delighted, therefore, to discover later that many of these stories were exciting and amusing. I think this is why I enjoy making classic tales accessible to young children."'

Sources:

marciawilliams.co.uk (accessed: January 22, 2019).

walker.co.uk (accessed: January 1, 2019).

biography.jrank.org (accessed: January 1, 2019).

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Additional information

Summary

This book presents biographies of a series of notable women through the ages, arranged chronologically, with a double spread devoted to each subject. The first subject, Cleopatra VII, is followed by another ancient woman: Boudicca. After this, the book moves to the fifteenth century with Joan of Arc; it continues with Elizabeth I, Mary Wollstonecraft, Jane Austen, Florence Nightingale, Marie Curie, Eleanor Roosevelt, Amelia Earhart, Frida Kahlo, Anne Frank, Wangari Maathai, Mae C. Jemison, Cathy Freeman and, finally, Malala Yousafzai. After these sections on specific women, there is a double spread comprised of short biographies of a range of female 'leaders and world changers'. Most of these are modern women, with twentieth century figures especially well represented, along with the Egyptian pharaoh, Hatshepsut. This is followed by a double spread on 'sportswomen and creatives.' Again, these are all modern figures apart from one ancient woman: the Sumerian poet Enheduanna. The final spread celebrates women 'Scientists, pioneers and adventurers' from the late 18th century onwards.

A final double-page spread includes a letter addressed to the reader where the author, 'with luck and inspiration,' explains that the women she has selected are all 'incredible females… from all backgrounds, all nations and all ages' (p. 44, unnumbered). She states that which one is regarded as the most important will depend on the individual reader. She continues that the women included in the book have'reminded [her] that, whether you are a boy or a girl, you are never too old to do something world changing.' The book ends with a list of other notable women along with another banner, left blank, for readers to add names of their own.

Each entry is presented in comic-book form. The left and right margins include brief facts relevant to each topic, at the bottom of each pair of pages, a boy called Abe and a girl called Dot provide a running commentary on each woman or theme.

Analysis

The book celebrates women who, generally, going against the grain of the views of gender common in their families and communities, managed – and in the case of the still-living women - have managed to make some distinctive contribution to their society and to history

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more broadly.

The first of the two women of the classical world, Cleopatra VII, is presented as distinctive for her intelligence and her ambition, as a result of which, under her leadership, Egypt prospered. But while most entries end with some detail on how the woman being celebrated has been a source of inspiration in some way, this one ends with the death by suicide of Cleopatra, and the incorporation of Egypt into the Roman Empire.

The next example, Boudicca, is described as distinct in her community as, in Boudicca's words 'a warrior not a weaver' (p. 8). When her people, the Iceni of Britain, rebel against Roman power, Williams explains that Boudicca and her daughters are captured, 'Boudicca was outraged!' (p. 9). This might be a punning reference, for older readers, to the rape perpetuated by the Roman captors. If so, wartime rape counts among the many dark topics presented comically in Williams' work: see e.g. the entry on *The Twelve Tasks of Heracles* in this database.

As Williams narrates, Boudicca goes on to lead 100,000 men in rebellion, but this ends with the defeat of the army, and Boudicca and her daughters kill themselves to avoid being captured for a second time. The manner of her death recalls that of Cleopatra. However, while Cleopatra's suicide marks the end of Egyptian independence, according to Williams, the position of the Celtic tribes under Roman rule eventually improves thanks to her actions. And while the most positive concluding point provided about Cleopatra is that she was the last 'true pharaoh' of Egypt, the legacy of Boudicca was to become 'a symbol to female freedom fighters everywhere' (p. 9).

The various women celebrated in the book are offered as inspiration for the intended readers to do something exceptional in their own lives. 'Children' here means boys and girls alike, as Williams keeps stressing, particularly via the two young children, Dot and Abe, who provide a running commentary throughout the book. The tone for this commentary is set early on. Abe says – in response to Dot's explanation that the book is about 'Amazing, fantastic girls' – that, 'Boys do amazing things too'. As Dot explains, 'there are lots of books about them already!' (pp. 4–5, unnumbered).

Boudicca Celts Cleopatra VII Egypt Iceni Roman Britain Roman Egypt

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Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Roman Empire
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adversity Authority Childhood Child's view Conflict Death Disobedience Family Freedom Gender Gender expectations/construction Gender, female Girls Historical figures History Humour Oppression Past Rape Success and failure Suicide Violence War

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