Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: Hit the Road, Helen! (Myth-O-Mania, 9) by Kate McMullan , Denis Zilber", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Susan Deacy. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/689. Entry version as of November 19, 2026.

Kate McMullan , Denis Zilber

Hit the Road, Helen! (Myth-O-Mania, 9)

United Kingdom (2013)

TAGS: Achilles Agamemnon Aphrodite Apollo Athena Cassandra Cupid Hades Hector Helen Hephaestus Hera Paris (Trojan Prince) Poseidon Priam Trojan War Zeus

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

General information	
Title of the work	Hit the Road, Helen! (Myth-O-Mania, 9)
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United States
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2013
First Edition Details	Kate McMullan, *Myth-O-Mania: Hit the Road, Helen!* Mankato: Stone Arch Books, 2013, 241 pp.
ISBN	9781434291158 (E-book)
Genre	Humor, Mythological fiction, Novels, Teen fiction*
Target Audience	Crossover (Children and young adults: 9–13)
Author of the Entry	Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Lisa Maurice, Bar-Ilan University, lisa.maurice@biu.ac.il Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk

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

Photo courtesy of Kate McMullan.

Kate McMullan , b. 1947
(Author)

Grew up in St. Louis, Missouri, but now lives in Sag Harbor, New York. McMullan began her career as a teacher after which she studied Early Childhood Education. She worked as a teacher in Los Angeles and an American Air Force base in Germany. She is married to and works with the illustrator Jim McMullan.

She has commented: "As soon as I could, I began reading my way through the Children's Room shelves at our local public library in St. Louis, Missouri. I carried my books home, settled in with a cat or dog or my guinea pigs on my lap, and read for hours. My favorites were Greek myths, Nancy Drew mysteries, Pippi Longstocking, and animal stories, but only if the animals didn't die. I also read *Little Women* (it was sad but acceptable if people died) and *The Borrowers*, about tiny people who lived behind the walls of houses. I loved comic books, too, and *Mad Magazine*. When asked what I wanted to be when I grew up, I answered, "A reader."

"After college, I taught fourth grade in an inner-city Los Angeles school and on an American Air Force base in Germany. Every day after lunch I read to my students, and in time I started to wonder if I could write books like the ones I read to my class. I tried, but after a day of teaching, I had little energy left for writing, so I moved to New York City, where I'd heard writers lived, and took a job in publishing, which was less tiring than teaching."

"And I kept writing – stories about Fluffy, the Classroom Guinea Pig (who will never die), a Greek Mythology series, books set in a medieval school for dragon-slaying, and picture books with art by my favorite illustrator, Jim McMullan." (source, see here, accessed: February 21, 2019).

Since she started writing, McMulland has published over 100 children's books. Her book *Pearl and Wagner: One Funny Day* was a Geisel Honor Book, and her book *I Stink!* was a Boston Globe-Horn Book Award Honor Book.

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Sources:

Official website (accessed: June 26, 2018).

Profile at penguinrandomhouse.com (accessed: June 26, 2018).

Profile at harpercollins.com (accessed: June 26, 2018).

Profile at amazon.com (accessed: February 21, 2019).

Bio prepared by Allison Rosenblum, Bar-Ilan University, allie.rose89@gmail.com and Tikva Schein, Bar-Ilan University, tikva.blaukopf@gmail.com

Questionnaire

1. What drew you to writing / working with Classical Antiquity and what challenges did you face in selecting, representing, or adapting particular myths or stories?
I have always loved the ancient Greek myths, even as a child. I write books for kids, and thought it would be fun to retell some of the myths with a bit of twist, and what I came up with was using Hades as my narrator. In some versions of the myths, Hades is Zeus's older brother, and I thought having his little brother be the ruler of the Universe would annoy Hades quite a bit, so I figured that would make his retelling funny and engaging for kids.

2. Why do you think classical / ancient myths, history, and literature continue to resonate with young audiences?
I believe it's because the dieties are, for the most part, depicted as very human, with great character flaws as well as the capacity to do great good. I think humans connect with these gods and goddesses because of they show different aspects of the human heart.

3. Do you have a background in classical education (Latin or Greek at school or classes at the University?)
NO.

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4. What sources are you using? Scholarly work? Wikipedia? Are there any books that made an impact on you in this respect?
I used the *D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths* and *Theoi.com* as well as various other sources. Although I wasn't telling the myths in the traditional way, I did try to stay faithful to the way each myth is usually presented.

Prepared by Allison Rosenblum, Bar-Ilan University, allie.rose89@gmail.com

Photo courtesy of Denis Zilber.

Denis Zilber , b. 1962
(Illustrator)

Denis has a diploma in Advanced Character Animation Studies and has won the following awards for his freelance work as illustrator and character designer: “CG Choice” award of CGSociety.org (3 times), Animation Mentor Showcase 2009, *Frontpage Exellence* award of 3DTotal.com (twice). He has publications in *Expose 4 – Finest digital art in the known universe* by Ballistic Publishing, Australia, as well as in *2D Artist magazine* and *CGWorld magazine*.

Source:

Official website (accessed: May 29, 2018).

Bio prepared by Allison Rosenblum, Bar-Ilan University, allie.rose89@gmail.com

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Additional information

Summary

This is the ninth book in the Myth-O-Mania series. In this series, Hades is the narrator who promises to tell the whole truth about the Greek myth; he claims that his brother, Zeus, is a myth-o-maniac (that is, a liar) and that he fabricated the myths and wrote his version so that he and his children will appear noble and praiseworthy.

In this book, Hades tells the story of Helen of Troy. Hades claims that in his version, Zeus put the blame for the Trojan War on Helen. Yet Hades claims, that it was actually Cupid who shot one of his arrows at Helen, and made her fall in love with Paris and run away with him. Hades notes that war is a terrible thing and that usually it is started over things that could be resolved by just talking. The author begins the story with Helen's birth. Leda lays two eggs after encountering Zeus (disguised as a swan) although the details are spared from the young readers. Leda thinks the babies who hatched (2 babies form each egg) look like her husband, Tyndareus. Tyndareus thinks that Pollux and Helen do not resemble him (although Castor and Clytemnestra curiously do). Therefore the 4 children grow up together thinking that these mortals are the parents of all of them. Helen then meets Menelaus and in the end marries him and they live happily together.

Then the author narrates the story about Eris and the apple, which caused the feud between the goddesses as a result of Paris' choice of Aphrodite as the most beautiful goddess of all. Then Aphrodite uses Cupid to shoot his arrow at Helen (which, according to Cupid, was also Zeus' wish). Menelaus and Odysseus first sail alone to Tory in order to convince Paris to fight, but Aphrodite hides him. Then the other suitors join them and sail to Troy due to their oath. His tricks do not work, however, and they eventually join the host and sail to Troy. Hades relentlessly tries to talk with the people involved and stop the war but ultimately fails. In the end, Hades manages to get the gods' help for ending the war. After the death of Hector and Achilles, the story continues until the construction of the Trojan horse and the sailing home to Sparta of Helen and Menelaus.

Analysis

The Trojan War is of course the most famous myth from ancient Greece and so the author takes upon herself a mammoth task to

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narrate it in a book series that specializes in a lighthearted retelling of myths. The care with which the author handles the myth is evident. She does not alter it in the way she did with Medusa's or Theseus' stories (in which she chose in her retelling a happy ending for the characters). She cannot ignore the Trojan War or give it a happy ending since this story is a fundamental story of Greek literature (and history). The author provides a very detailed narration of the war, inserting all the most memorable myths form the Trojan cycle, from Helen's birth, to Philoctetes and the bow of Hercules. Hades even tries to stop Odysseus and Achilles from joining the war (he refers to them as the most famous heroes in Greece, probably since the author will be retelling the Odyssey later). This book is the most complete in the series in terms of richness of sources and information. Thus, Hades explains why he could not stop it, although he spent years trying. The reasons he cites are that he did not want to interfere too much with the affairs of mortals and that the gods also took part in the war.

Putting the blame on Cupid and not on Helen, reveals that the author wished to clear Helen of any responsibility for the war (a feminist decision perhaps) and also blame it more on the gods than on mortals. Furthermore, the author wishes to convey the foolishness and uselessness of war. Hades blames Zeus for blaming Helen for the war, since if the mortals wold have found out it was his fault, they would not have sacrificed to him anymore. Zeus is of course constantly attacked in this series for his shameful and selfish acts. However, putting such a mundane reason behind Zeus' decision to blame Helen (his ear that humans will not sacrifice to him anymore if they found out he was to blame for the war) brings up more questions. Is the author trying to make a point regarding the gods – the selfish Greek gods? Or taking responsibility in general? It is hard to say, but there is no doubt that she deliberately chose a trifling motivation for Zeus' acts.

Since this is a more complicated tale than others in the series, the author provides the names and roles of the major characters at the beginning, so the readers will not be too confused (although some of the original characters are missing. For example, the feud between Agamemnon and Achilles is mentioned, but not Chriseis or Briseis since the author does not relate to sexual violence). This story may be aimed at more mature readership than the more light-hearted stories. The author is careful to start her story also from the very beginning of Helen's birth. Although she inserts Hades' involvement, she keeps

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quite close to the original myth. She also incorporates the tale about Achilles being dipped in the Styx by Thetis, and the prophecy regarding the curse Paris would bring upon Troy. The author is interested in revealing as much information about the Trojan cycle to her readers as possible.

Paris is described as silly and vain, which recalls his description in the Iliad. The author also includes Cassandra, who was punished from her wish to marry and stop being Apollo's priestess. Again, the author leaves out details regarding sexual violence. The author uses a parallel situation in order to show the transformation in Helen after she was stabbed by Cupid's arrow. Before, when Hades came to warn her she must remain with Menelaus, she confidently assures him she was Helen of Sparta. After running away with Paris, when Hades tries to reason with her, she tells him she is Helen of Troy now. With this simple clever semantic change, the story and tragedy of Helen are simply played out.

Interestingly, while in the prologue Hades states that a good talk could have stopped the war, all of his endeavours to talk with the different characters end up as failures; he cannot persuade Helen, Paris or the gods. During a council of the gods, when each states their support for the Greeks or Trojans, Zeus states he is not sure if he understands what being fair means. This is a hint again at the unfairness of war, and the gods. Although it is written more comically, the message is grave and deals with a serious matter of fairness and war. The horrors of war are minimised, yet the author recalls them by referring to the ghosts who go down to Hades' realm. Thus she combines the main hero of the series, Hades, and tells the story from a different angle than it is usually told. In a quite absurd scene, the ghosts hear the war stories from new ghosts and each side cheers on their camp. Again, it is an interesting and refreshing way to tell the story, in that she mentions the many casualties, but in a way that does not traumatize or scare the young readers. Furthermore, it also highlights the absurdity of war on a more complex level; in the end, all the ghosts go down together to the same place, regardless whether they are Greeks or Trojans. Sarpedon is aware in the underworld that he was killed by Patroclus when the two ghosts confront each other. When Hector dies he meets Penthesilea, allowing the author to add another myth to her narrative.

Hades finally manages to get the gods' consent to help him end the war when he appeals to their selfishness, by explaining that if the war

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continues, they will not get sacrifices. This is of course a simplistic way of describing the Greek gods, yet it is in line with the light-hearted yet critical atmosphere the author uses from the first book in reference to them. In a tragic twist, Helen fears for Hector and wishes to stop the killing (although she didn't care about the war at the beginning). While the author mentions many of the important Trojan heroes, there is less emotional investment in them. They are mentioned more as stereotypes of the great heroes they were and there is no real attempt to make any of them unique or invest time in creating an emotional bond between the character and the readers. This of course could be in part because the author tries to narrate the Trojan war without upsetting the readers too much. She wishes to focus on the folly of the war and on Helen, and therefore she does not dwell too much on developing the character of any of the heroes.

In the end, Helen and Menelaus are the only ones who receive some kind of happy ending, when Helen tells Menelaus they have a long journey home to start understanding each other again. This is a fitting end, since the war erupted due to mistrust and misunderstanding, and now these mortals need to pick up the pieces and go on with their lives. The author does not mention any heartbreaking scenes in relation to the fall of Troy; she laconically mentions that some tried to escaped, captured yet many were slain. In the epilogue, Hades tells the readers that myths are not fairy tales and there are not many happy endings. This is a thought-provoking observation, which teaches the readers the difference between myths and fairy tales, although the author herself chose to treat other myths as similar to fairy tales when she deliberately chose to end them happily. In a nice twist, Cassandra's ghost advises Hades that his next book should be on Odysseus' voyage. Cassandra seems happy and content in the underworld and thus this bitter sweet ending makes the reader feel a little more encouraged, despite the sad events narrated in the book; in the end, there is a happy ending for some characters, but simply in another world.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Achilles Agamemnon Aphrodite Apollo Athena Cassandra Cupid Hades Hector Helen Hephaestus Hera Paris (Trojan Prince) Poseidon Priam Trojan War Zeus

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Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Death Love Revenge War
Further Reading	The review refers to the ebook edition

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