Kate McMullan , Denis Zilber

Phone Home, Persephone! (Myth-O-Mania, 2)

UK (2012)

TAGS: Cerberus Charon Demeter Furies Hades Hera Hypnos Minos Persephone Zeus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Phone Home, Persephone! (Myth-O-Mania, 2)
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United States of America
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2012
First Edition Details	Kate McMullan, *Myth-O-Mania: Phone Home, Persephone.* Mankato: Stone Arch Books, 2012, 150 pp.
ISBN	9781434221353; 9781434246776 (e-book)
Genre	Humor, Mythological fiction, Novels, Teen fiction*
Target Audience	Children (8–13)
Author of the Entry	Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com
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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 second book in the Myth-O-Mania series, which offer alternative versions of the Greek myths, narrated by Hades. Hades, who is a self-professed shy and serious god, 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. Hades' versions offer the "true" story of the myths.

This book in the series reveals Hades' "truth" behind the kidnapping of Persephone. Hades claims that he did not kidnap her at all, it was she who jumped into his cart to the underworld and then refused to leave. Hades recalls how he first met Persephone on earth and she asked him for a ride. Then, after talking on the cellphone with her mother, she asked him to show her the underworld. Hades refuses, and explains that the entry to the underworld is allowed to ghosts only; yet unbeknown to him, Persephone clings to his cart and asks him to let her stay a night in the underworld. When they arrive at Elysium they witness an eternal rock concert; Persephone hurries to join it but forgets to phone home and leaves her phone with Hades. When Persephone returns she refuse to call back her mother. She tells Hades her mother is Demeter and asks to stay with him. Hades decides to send her home with one of the furies. Yet Persephone discovers that the furies betray her when they return her to her mother and forces them to bring Hades to a picnic with her. During the picnic, Persephone makes Cupid shoot one of his arrows at Hades, who immediately falls in love with her and asks her hand in marriage.

Meanwhile, Demeter believes her daughter was kidnapped and storms the underworld with the other Olympians. However, since Persephone ate the food of the dead she must remain there. Then the gods dispute whether Hades and Persephone should wed and Hades is hurt to find out about Cupid's involvement. In the end, there is a happy conclusion as Hades and Persephone confess their love and decide that Persephone will divide her time between earth and the underworld. The book also contains a guide to the myth, glossary and discussion questions which emphasize the pedagogical side of the book.

Analysis

This series offers a comic inversion of the well-known myths. While

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Zeus is hardly a gallant hero in most stories, he has a more positive role than Hades. Hades is at times being branded as the “bad guy” (for example, in movies) due to his connection to the underworld. This series focus on sympathy for a supposed underdog figure and Hades fits this description, being the more reserved and shy god. Even if he is not treated as such in Greek mythology, his character was mostly avoided in myths due to his frightening nature. Here the author is showing that Hades is very likable and that the underworld is not so gloomy and scary; perhaps she aims to make death a less traumatic or frightening concept for the young readers. There is life in death as well. Thus in this series he becomes a true hero (in his own mind at least) who is an innocent bystander; he claims that he is certainly not a kidnapper or a villain. Since he is the narrator and offers his own version which is presented as the truth, he appears honest. The readers are introduced to Hades’ own thoughts and contemplations. In fact, he even distances himself from the other Olympians. Hades is portrayed as a cool type persona, driving his chariot around (his horses are even named Harley and Davidson).

While Hades is an Olympian god himself, his character is also used to poke fun at the other gods, especially at their weird conduct (which is quite unacceptable to modern sensitivities). The author uses him to make ironic remark about the common tropes of the Greek gods. For example, Hades sarcastically remarks that the other gods are used to marry each other and that he cannot keep track of their offspring any more. Thus his character is used as a mythological persona on the one hand, but is also used to poke fun at the mythological stories on the other.

This underworld is also far removed from the usual bleak portrayal. There is a comic sign at the entrance: “WELCOME TO THE UNDERWORLD! MORTALS EVERYWHERE ARE DYING TO GET IN”. Thus the author makes the young reader less scared of the world of the dead and more accustomed to the idea of a separate realm dedicated to the deceased. Death and the underworld are thus being portrayed in more light-hearted fashion, in order to make the young reader more accustomed to these concepts and accept them as natural and not menacing. Therefore it is accentuated that the underworld is Hades’ home and he feels comfortable in it. He even has TV and other items which are associated with regular home, this showing that the underworld is home like any other. It is important to portray death and the underworld in more light-hearted tones in some stories, since it can make children less afraid of it. For Hades, this was

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simply home and this is the idea the author tries to convey; it may be strange home, but home nonetheless. Even the mighty Cerberus is referred to as Cerbie, like a pet and there is a Motel Styx as well, the temporary quarters for new ghosts. The use of the word “ghosts” is also interesting. Ghosts can be scary (like in ghost stories), but can also be friendly, like Casper. While Persephone is afraid of ghosts, Hades is used to them, thus again presenting the idea in a comforting way to the young readers, who can get used to the idea of ghost as something natural that they should not fear. The underworld is described in visual and tangible descriptions that the young readers can grasp and to which they can relate, removing overtones of it as a distant and scary place.

Persephone is also far removed from the image of the innocent maiden, which is the traditional depiction of her character before her marriage to Hades. She is scheming yet also trustful. However, she even manages to threaten the furies. She is so desperate to get away from her over-protective mother that she is willing to do anything. Again the story is played for laughs, but many children can relate to Persephone’s feelings, although the author is also careful to show the other side as well, of the carrying mother. Running away from home is not the answer. Yet Persephone is not just using Hades, she truly loves him and the fairy-tale ending helps smooth the previous challenges. True love wins but so do mother-daughter relations. All Demeter needed to do was truly and openly talk with her daughter, see her as a grown-up and not as a helpless child. Persephone gets her man and her mother gets her daughter – a win-win situation. This shows that one should not choose between a lover and family and that they can coexist. Since the setting is of a mythical-fantastic world, the age gap between the two (or the fact that they are uncle and niece) is irrelevant. Interestingly, Persephone likes Hades because he appears so “in charge”. She hated this trait in her own mother and claims her mother is controlling. It seems as if Persephone is replacing her over-controlling mother with a man she believes can take care of her, because he seems so commanding. It is an interesting psychological twist, which one wonders if the author considered. Persephone never really gets to be independent, merely moving from her mother to Hades, but again, the happily-ever-after ending makes the story appear like a children’s fairy-tale; any psychological challenges are therefore ignored.

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Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Cerberus Charon Demeter Furies Hades Hera Hypnos Minos Persephone Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Family Humour Love Romance

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