Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: Say Cheese, Medusa! (Myth-O-Mania, 3) by Kate McMullan , Denis Zilber", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/694. Entry version as of November 11, 2026.

Kate McMullan , Denis Zilber

Say Cheese, Medusa! (Myth-O-Mania, 3)

United States (2012)

TAGS: Athena Charon Danae Furies Hades Medusa Persephone Perseus Phorcys Poseidon Zeus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Say Cheese, Medusa! (Myth-O-Mania, 3)
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States of America
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2012
First Edition Details	Kate McMullan, *Myth-O-Mania: Say Cheese, Medusa.* Mankato: Stone Arch Books, 2012, 208 pp.
ISBN	9781434229984; 9781434246790 (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
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Lisa Maurice, Bar-Ilan University, lisa.maurice@biu.ac.il Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

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 third 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.

In this book Hades promises to tell the truth about Medusa. The story opens when Hades, Poseidon and Zeus are meeting together at Athena's new temple. Poseidon has invited Eno, Riley and Medusa (somewhat altered names for the gorgons) yet lied to them, telling them that Athena's temple was actually his. When they are celebrating at the temple, Athena suddenly shows up. Athena blames Medusa for seeking Poseidon's attention and organizing the festivities so she turns her hair to snakes and make her and her sisters monstrous. Poseidon and Hades cannot reverse Athena's curse and try to supply the gorgons with new identities and home.

Danaë then appears at Hades' home with baby Perseus. Hades reveals to her that the baby's father is Zeus. With time Hades and Persephone become good friends with Danaë and her rather annoying baby Perseus, and even swear to protect him. Years later (which seems like moments for the gods) Perseus grows up and promises to cut off Medusa's head. Hades decides to accompany him on his journey, also in order to protect Medusa. In the end Perseus fails in hurting Medusa and Athena returns the gorgons to their former appearance in exchange for some beauty products. Perseus meanwhile receives a fake head of Medusa to bring back to King Polydectes. The book also contains a guide to the myth, glossary and discussion questions which emphasize the pedagogical side of the book.

Analysis

The premise of the series is both comical and thought-provoking. Hades promises to tell the "truth and nothing but the truth" about the Greek myths. Of course, this statement is in some kind of opposition to the idea of myth, where there is neither truth nor lies, but stories. Hades offers his own version, of course. This play regarding truth and absurdity is what makes the stories fun and relevant to the young

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readers. The different characters are almost stripped of their ancient status and brought down to a more mundane and contemporary existence (for example, Medusa is running a spa). The books, therefore, work on two levels; the readers need to be familiar with the original "true" myths in order to appreciate this take on them or the joke will be lost on them. So the game of true and false is applied to readers' knowledge and expectations as well. Since the source material is known, the author can play with its reception. It is different from retelling of myths for toddler or children who are not familiar with the stories at all. However, this book also refers to readers who are not familiar with the myths at all, and therefore "Zeus' version" is also shared with them. Here the irony and humor are the direct result of altering the readers' expectations of the myths. This recalls research done on the importance of the reader in the process of reception and the reader's previous knowledge (for example, Iser and Jauss' theories on readers' importance).

The other serious issue being treated here is parents' negligence of their children. Medusa is described as a sensible goddess who just discovered she had three older sisters; her mother sent them away to the Grey Sisters because of their strange appearance. She and Hades discuss the horrid ways that children were treated by members of their own families. This conversation and treatment of the issue by the author takes a very common element in the ancient myths (negligence) and jokily yet sensitively exposes it as wrong. This approach can help neglected children deal with the trauma involved in such cases. On the one hand, they can relate to the mythological characters who have been abandoned and feel their pain (they even become part of the mythological being themselves in a way) and on the other, this treatment is branded as wrong and evil. As Medusa notes, "It's so unfair to judge gods or goddesses – or even mortals – by the way they look." This is a strong anti-bullying claim and also a comment about appearances and their importance which is repeated in another book in the series, about Cupid.

The story closes with a happily-ever-after fairy-tale ending. The gorgons turn back to their former lovely selves and all become friends with Athena and Perseus; the bullies have become good friends at the end. In the epilogue, the author always refers to Hades stories, almost like a co-writer. We learn how he gives her stories for others to read and comment on, just as a real author might. It is a nice touch to show Hades' literary endeavors as a real author who resembles the author of the book – a metafictive element, to use the term offered by

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	Elizabeth Hale. The discussion questions at the end of the book raise some interesting questions that are usually left unanswered in relation to the myth. For example, was Perseus right in claiming he would kill Medusa in order to save his mother? Was Athena's punishment justified? This shows that the author wishes for children to question the deeper meaning of the myth, and go beneath the humour overlaying it. Behind the jokes there are serious matters that should be discussed and the myth is a helpful tool in triggering such discussion. The original Greek myth seem at times unfair and even cruel, especially to modern (and feminist eyes). The story of Medusa is a fine example of victim-blaming from the ancient myths. The author cannot change the original myths, yet she can and does play around them; giving them a fairer ending which resembles a happy end. She gives her readers the original version and then she refutes it by noting that it was all lies and the truth is something in between. When female characters are introduced, it seems as if the author is trying to make an extra effort to change their less fortunate fate from the myth and give them a better conclusion. By doing so she is also making them role-models for the young readers, of strong women, not victims or monsters.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Athena Charon Danae Furies Hades Medusa Persephone Perseus Phorcys Poseidon Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Family Humour Love Romance
Further Reading	Iser, Wolfgang, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974. Iser, Wolfgang, *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary*

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Anthropology, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.

Jauss, Hans Robert, *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970.

Jauss, Hans Robert, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, Timothy Bahti, trans., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982.

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