Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: Persephone & the Evil King (Little Goddess Girls, 6) by Yuyi Chen, Joan Holub, Suzanne Williams ", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1297. Entry version as of November 01, 2026.

Yuyi Chen , Joan Holub , Suzanne Williams

Persephone & the Evil King (Little Goddess Girls, 6)

United States of America (2021)

TAGS: Aphrodite Artemis Athena Hephaestus Heracles Hestia Persephone





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

General information	
Title of the work	Persephone & the Evil King (Little Goddess Girls, 6)
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2021
First Edition Details	Joan Holub, Suzanne Williams, *Little Goddess Girls: Persephone & the Evil King*. New York: Aladdin Quix, 2021, 88 pp.
ISBN	9781534479630
Genre	Fiction
Target Audience	Children (5–8 years)
Author of the Entry	Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@biu.ac.il
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Lisa Maurice, Bar-Ilan University, lisa.maurice@biu.ac.il Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com

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



Yuyi Chen (Illustrator)

Yuyi Chen is an American children's book illustrator from Washington. She also did 3D modelling, design and texturing and animation. Her books include *Doris the Bookasaurus* and *Going to Grandma's House*.

Source:

Official website (accessed: August 11, 2020).

Bio prepared by Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@biu.ac.il



Photo courtesy of Joan Holub.

Joan Holub , b. 1956
(Author)

Joan Holub is a prolific children's author from the USA. Graduated from college in Texas with a fine arts degree. Worked as an art director at Scholastic trade books in New York. She has written and/or illustrated over 150 children's books. She has developed a range of series for teenagers on mythological themes: *Goddess Girls*, set in Mount Olympus Academy, *Grimmtastic Tales* series, set in Grimm Academy, *Thunder Girls*, about Norse gods set in Asgard Academy, and *Heroes in Training*, in which the male Greek gods, as very young men, set out on a range of adventures. For pre-school children, Jan Holub has written on a range of topics including several works with religious and historical themes. These include: *This Little President*; *This Little Trailblazer*, *Hooray for St. Patrick's Day!*, and *Light the Candles: A Hanukkah Lift-the-Flap Book*. Joan Holub trained in fine art and worked as an art director at a graphic design company before

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becoming a children's illustrator and then author.

Sources:

Official website (accessed: July 2, 2018).

Profile at the penguinrandomhouse.com (accessed: July 2, 2018).

Profile at the simonandschuster.com (accessed: July 2, 2018).

Bio prepared by Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk and Allison Rosenblum, Bar-Ilan University, allie.rose89@gmail.com and Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@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 learned to love Greek and Norse mythology in elementary school. I'm very comfortable adapting the framework of an existing myth or fairy tale by pushing it into a different setting, adding humor, and/or building in a nonfiction component. Staying true to the essential core of each myth along the way is important to me. A young *Goddess Girls* reader once told me she enjoyed the series because she "learned something". In other words, while she liked being entertained, she appreciated that her familiarity and factual understanding of the original myths was broadened at the same time.

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

Kids have questions about their world. So it's interesting to them to learn how ancient Greeks and other cultures answered questions

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about how their world worked in exciting tales of heroes and beasts. How did the sun cross the sky? In a chariot drawn by the god Helios. What caused night? The goddess Nyx's starry cape covered the sky. Thrilling stories of courage and danger, such as Heracles' twelve labors, the Trojan Horse, and the Argonauts never go out of style.

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 have an entire shelf of mythology resource books. Some of my favorite go-to sources are the *Scholastic Mythlopedia* series, Edith Hamilton's *Mythology, Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes*, and www.theoi.com (accessed: May 28, 2018).

4. How concerned were you with "accuracy" or "fidelity" to the original? (another way of saying that might be – that I think writers are often more "faithful" to originals in adapting its spirit rather than being tied down at the level of detail – is this something you thought about?)

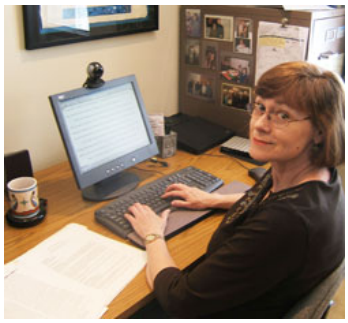
Each book in the *Goddess Girls* series (ages 8–12, Simon and Schuster) and *Heroes in Training* series (ages 7–10, Simon and Schuster) is a retelling of one or two Greek myths, with a twist. We stay as true as possible to the core bones of an original myth in order to give young readers a good understanding, but we include kid situations and humor to entertain. As an example, in *Goddess Girls #1: Athena the Brain*, Athena is summoned to attend Mount Olympus Academy, where Zeus is the principal. MOA teachers include Mr. Cyclops, who teaches Hero-ology, a class where students are graded on their abilities to maneuver small hero figures such as Odysseus, around a gameboard to enact the Trojan War, etc. Meanwhile, Athena, who is the goddess of invention among other things, inadvertently turns mean-girl Medusa's hair to snakes and gives her the power to turn mortals to stone by means of a shampoo-like invention called Snakeypoo at the MOA invention fair.

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

Suzanne Williams and I have written a new middle grade series called *Thunder Girls* (accessed: May 28, 2018), which is a twist on Norse mythology featuring strong girl characters. The first book Freya and the Magic Jewel releases May 2018 for ages 8–12, published by Simon and Schuster.

Prepared by Allison Rosenblum, Bar-Ilan University, allie.rose89@gmail.com and Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com



Courtesy of the Author from her personal website.

Suzanne Williams , b. 1953
(Author)

Suzanne Williams is an American prolific children's author and former elementary school librarian. She has written over 60 books for children.

She grew up in Oregon and graduated with a bachelor's degree in sociology and a master's in library science from the University of Oregon. She currently lives in Reno, Washington.

Source:

Official website (accessed: May 29, 2018).

Bio prepared by Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com

Questionnaire

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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?

Writing about Greek mythology was my co-author, Joan Holub's idea. She's loved mythology since childhood. Her enthusiasm for the subject got me excited about it too. *Goddess Girls* (ages 8–12) was our very first collaboration. Soon there will be 26 books in that series. One of the challenges we've faced in writing our (soon to be four) myth-based series for young readers is how to handle the sexual and violent content of many of the myths.

To downplay the violence, we often make it cartoonish and lighten it with humor. Since most of our gods and goddesses are pre-teens (as are our readers!), we deal with inappropriate sexual content by making changes that still allow us to keep to the spirit of the myth. For example: in introducing the Adonis myth, in which Aphrodite and Persephone fight over a beautiful youth they both desire, we decided to make Adonis a kitten, rather than a young man.

Another challenge has involved familial relationships among the various gods and goddesses. In *Goddess Girls*, Zeus is an adult, the principal of Mount Olympus Academy, the school attended by our "goddessgirls" and "godboys". In mythology he would likely have fathered a good portion of the student body! So we made a decision that only Athena would call him "Dad". (Until Hebe popped forth from a lettuce in Book 21, that is.) We do acknowledge many other family relationships. For example: Apollo and Artemis as brother and sister. Medusa and her sisters Euryale and Stheno. Persephone and her mother, Demeter.

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

Myths have got all the elements that draw us to stories: action, conflict, drama, humor, etc. What's not to like?

3. Do you have a background in classical education (Latin or Greek at school or classes at the University?) What sources are

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you using? Scholarly work? Wikipedia? Are there any books that made an impact on you in this respect?

Neither Joan nor I have a classical education. I did take an online Greek and Roman mythology class a few years ago, however. (Taught by Peter Struck, University of Pennsylvania.) Terrific class!

For our Greek mythology-based series, Edith Hamilton's *Mythology* is the reference we rely on the most. My co-author and I do consult Wikipedia and other online resources, especially for lists of monsters and maps and general information about ancient Greece. References for *Thunder Girls*, our soon-to-be-published Norse mythology-based series include: *The Norse Myth*s by Kevin Crossley-Holland, D'Aulaires' *Book of Norse Myth*s, *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs* by John Lindow, *The Poetic Edda* (translated and edited by Jackson Crawford), and *The Prose Edda* by Snorri Sturluson (Penguin Classics).

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

In addition to *Goddess Girls*, my co-author and I have also collaborated on a second Greek mythology-based series called *Heroes in Training* (ages 6–9). It's a humorous quest/adventure series with Zeus, Poseidon, Hades and other Olympians as ten-year-olds on the run from King Cronus and the Titans. *Freya and the Magic Jewel*, the first book in *Thunder Girls*, our Norse mythology-based series, publishes May 1, 2018. I travel to Norway frequently to visit my daughter, granddaughter, and Norwegian son-in-law, so I am very excited to be doing a Norse-myth series. Aladdin (Simon & Schuster) publishes all three of Joan's and my mythology-based series. We will be doing a fourth myth-based series with them soon – for ages 5–8. Tentative title is *Little Goddess Girls*, and it will be another Greek myth-based series.

Prepared by Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com

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Additional information

Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs

Previous book: *Little Goddess Girls* (Series, Book 5): *Athena & the Island Enchantress*.

Next book: *Little Goddess Girls* (Series, Book 7): *Aphrodite & the Magic Box*.

Summary

In the sixth book of the "Little Goddess Girls" series, the little goddess girls and Heracles continue their quest to free the queen of the mysterious island. After leaving the sorceress Circe in her palace, the group arrive at the palace of the evil king Hephaestus in the mountain. Athena and her dog Oliver manage to pass through the heavy doors and disappear. Their friends hurry after them and arrive at the king's throne room. The king is accompanied by stick soldiers who act as his guards. He tells them that he has turned Athena, Oliver and the queen into treasures. The group must find them in the treasure room in order to free them.

Persephone is chosen as the representative, and although she is scared to fail, she manages to discover the treasures and free Athena, Oliver and the queen. The annoyed king then tries to prevent them from leaving his palace, when suddenly Hestia appears. She tells the king that he had used his magic cane for evil and therefore it is taken from him, causing the king to lose his power, whereupon his army of stick men leaves him. Hestia gives the cane to Persephone instead.

The queen remains on the island with Heracles, who will help her rebuild her kingdom. The four girls then decide to go to Sparke city and spend some more time together.

Analysis

This book does not refer to any specific mythological tale. Hephaestus, the evil king, is not an inventor, but rather someone who uses his magical cane for evil and demands that everyone serves him. His character does not bare any close resemblance to the blacksmith god, except for the fact that they both dwell within a mountain.

The main heroine in this tale is Persephone. Persephone feels that she is less worthy than her friends and does not possess anything that

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could help them. "If only I had something that would help us on our quest or in battle, thought Persephone. Aphrodite had a chariot. Artemis, her bow and arrows. Heracles, his strength and club. And Athena had winged sandals that could fly her anywhere [...] But flowers weren't useful in a quest or in battle. So how could Persephone help?" (p. 9). When Aphrodite offers the king her chariot in replacement of their captive friends, Persephone feels worthless, because she has nothing to offer.

When Persephone is chosen to participate in the king's game, she is worried she might miss this chance to rescue her friends, she does not have enough confidence in herself even if all her friends trust her. She manages to discover that the king taps a certain table, so she figures out that this is where her friends are hidden as treasures and she solves the game, not by luck but by using her own mind. "But really, thought Persephone, it isn't luck that helped me win the game. Her four-leaf clovers had been too weak to aid her guesses. She'd figured out what the king was up to on her own. It was just the sort of brainy thinking Athena might have done." (p. 65).

By so doing, Persephone proves herself worthy of the powers of the magic cane and accepts it from Hestia, after trying her best to save her friends without relying on magic, but on her own thinking. In the end, Artemis says that she wished she had a cane as well, a feeling to which Persephone can relate. "Her words made Persephone remember how she'd wished for things the others had too. Things she thought would be useful in battle or during their quest. As it turned out, she hadn't needed anything but her own smart thinking to best the king." (p. 72). The message is that people should try their best and have self-confidence. We do not need magic powers to solve problems, the true power lies within.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aphrodite Artemis Athena Hephaestus Heracles Hestia Persephone
Addenda	The review refers to the Kindle edition (9781534479647).

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