Mary Appleby, "Entry on: A Winter's Promise [Les Fiancés de l'hiver] (The Mirror Visitor Quartet [La Passe-Miroir], 1) by Christelle Dabos", peer-reviewed by Elizabeth Hale and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2022). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1473. Entry version as of November 07, 2026.

Christelle Dabos

A Winter's Promise [Les Fiancés de l'hiver] (The Mirror Visitor Quartet [La Passe-Miroir], 1)

France (2013)

TAGS: Arcadia Artemis Hero(es) Labyrinth Latin (Language) Persephone





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

General information	
Title of the work	A Winter's Promise [Les Fiancés de l'hiver] (The Mirror Visitor Quartet [La Passe-Miroir], 1)
Country of the First Edition	France
Country/countries of popularity	France, Europe, Australia, USA
Original Language	French
First Edition Date	2013
First Edition Details	Christelle Dabos, *Les Fiancés de l'hiver*. Paris: Gallimard Jeunesse, 2013, 528 pp.
ISBN	9782070653768
Official Website	Passe-miroir (accessed: July 28, 2022).
Awards	2013 – Concours du premier roman jeunesse organisé par Gallimard Jeunesse; 2014 – Prix Elbakin.net for Meilleur roman fantasy français Jeunesse; 2014 – Prix littéraire des collégiens de l'Héraut for Niveau 4e–3e; 2015 – Prix Ados Rennes Ille-et-Vilaine Nominee; 2016 – Grand Prix de l'Imaginaire.
Genre	Fantasy fiction, Novels
Target Audience	Young adults (14+)

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Creators



Publicity photo by Chloé Vollmer-Lo / Gallimard. Retrieved from Christelledabos (accessed: July 29, 2022).

Christelle Dabos , b. 1980
(Author)

Christelle Dabos is a French author. She was born in 1980 and grew up in Cannes on the French Riviera before making Belgium her home in 2005. Dabos was working as a librarian when she endured a significant health battle which ignited her passion for writing. Dabos began working on *Les Fiancés de l'hiver* (A Winter's Promise) in 2007. During this time Dabos joined the Plume d'Argent, an online writing community, and through this community was encouraged to enter the Gallimard First Youth Novel Competition in 2012. Dabos won the literary prize in 2013 with her manuscript for *A Winter's Promise*, the first novel in the *Mirror Visitor* series. The first two novels in the series received the Grand Prix de l'Imaginaire in the French language youth category in 2016. Following significant success in France, the novels were picked up for publishing by Europa Editions and translated into multiple languages in 2018. The series was completed in French in 2019 with the final instalment translated and published in 2021.

Source:

Gallimard Jeunesse, available at Babelio website (accessed: July 28, 2022).

Kantor, Emma, "Europa Crosses into YA territory with *A Winter's Promise*", *Publishers Weekly,* 2018 (accessed: July 28, 2022).

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Additional information

Translation

Hungarian: *A tél jegyesei*, trans. Zsófia Molnár, Budapest: Kolibri Kiadó, 2017.

Spanish: *Los Novios de invierno*, trans. Jorge Salgar, Panamericana Editorial, 2017.

Turkish: *Kış Nişanlıları*, trans. Karen Alguadiş, Istanbul: Genç Destek, 2017.

Czech: *Snoubenci zimy*, trans. Drahoslava Janderová, Praha: Baobab, 2018.

English: *A Winter's Promise*, trans. Hildegarde Serle, Europa Editions, Incorporated, 2018.

Italian: *Fidanzati dell'inverno*, trans. Alberto Bracci Testasecca, Roma: Edizioni E/O, 2018.

Portuguese: *Os Noivos do Inverno*, trans. Sofia Soter, Editoria Morro Branco, 2018.

Russian: *Обрученные холодом* [Obruchennye holodom], trans. Irina Volevich, Yuliya Rac, Moskva: KompasGid, 2018.

German: *Die Verlobten des Winters*, trans. Amelie Thoma, Berlin: Insel Verlag, 2019.

Korean: □□□ □□□□ □□ *1*□, trans. □□□ Yoon Seok, [South Korea]: Les Mots, 2019.

Polish: *Zimowe zaręczyny*, trans. Paweł Łapiński, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Entliczek, 2019.

Slovenian: *Zimska zaročenca*, trans. Živa Čebulj, Ljubljana: Sanje, 2019.

Dutch: *De ijzige verloofde*, trans. Eef Gratama, Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Luitingh Sijthoff, 2020.

Lithuanian: *Žiemos sužadėtiniai*, trans. Monika Rudokaitė-Marcinkevičienė, Vilnius: Nieko Rimto UAB, 2021.

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Ukrainian: *Зимові заручини* [Zymovi zaruchyny], trans. Iryna Serebryakova, Viktoriya Gusenok, Olga Lada-Chudnovska, Kharkov: Vivat, 2021.

Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs

Mirror Visitor Book #2: *The Missing of Clairdelune* [Les Disparus du Clairdelune],

Mirror Visitor Book #3: *The Memory of Babel* [La Mémoire de Babel],

Mirror Visitor Book #4: *The Storm of Echoes* [La Tempête des Échos].

Summary

When a cataclysm, known as the 'Rupture', destroyed the old world many generations ago, powerful ancestors known as 'Family Spirits' were entrusted with individual lands suspended in the sky, known as Arks. These Arks are governed by each Family Spirit and inhabited by their descendants who have been endowed with certain powers. On the Ark of Anima, a family-based, and pleasant Ark, the reigning Family Spirit is Artemis, the Mistress of Objects. Her ancestors are endowed with abilities relating to objects such as animating the inanimate, 'reading' the history of objects through touch and the emotions, and finally the rare ability to pass through mirrors. Artemis spends most of her time in her observatory studying the stars and astronomy rather than engaging directly with her descendants. This task is entrusted to The Doyennes, a group of elder female descendants who, besides Artemis, are the highest authority on Anima.

Ophelia, the seventeen-year-old protagonist, is a clumsy and reserved young woman that possesses the rare power of Mirror Visiting and Reading. She is fascinated by the Rupture and the old world, particularly Artemis' Book, an artefact that is written in a lost language on skin-like parchment which renders it unreadable by Ophelia's hands. Ophelia spends most of her time with her uncle, the Archivist, or in her Museum of Primitive History, which houses preserved objects from the old-world pre-dating the Rupture. She is often clad in her animated scarf, which behaves as a pet and her mood affected colour-change spectacles. Having denied many suitors for marriage, Ophelia is promised to marry Thorn, a stern and inscrutable man from the distant Ark of The Pole. She must leave Anima and

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travel to The Pole in anticipation of their arranged marriage. Ophelia is resentful of her circumstances, particularly as The Doyennes warn of her being shunned should she sabotage her impending marriage.

The Pole, the Ark of Farouk (the Master of Spirits) is a politically tumultuous Ark that revolves around a court comprised of rival clans, each in possession of unique powers. The Family Spirit Farouk is a powerful but languorous ancestor of The Pole's clans, concerned only with the translation of his Book. The Pole is a land of illusions and distortions, with powers boasting some element of psychic manipulation. Thorn belongs to the Dragons, a despised clan, whose power can inflict varying degrees of physical harm with invisible 'claws' that spread from their nervous systems, Thorn also seeks to learn the secrets contained within Farouk's Book.

Upon arrival to The Pole, Ophelia is thrust into hiding and the care of Thorn's tempestuous Aunt Berenilde. Ophelia is increasingly determined to carve out her own fate beyond the precarious position of her fiancé and his family. As the atmosphere surrounding Thorn and his aunt becomes ever threatening, Ophelia is forced out of hiding and into disguise as a servant named Mime when she moves to Clairdelune with her aunt and Berenilde. Ophelia must navigate the dangerous world of the court whilst maintaining her disguise.

At Clairdelune, Ophelia is faced not only with the task of caring for Berenilde, who is pregnant with Farouk's child, but also with navigating the labyrinthine structure of the buildings. Created by Madam Hildegarde, a native of Janus' Ark, LandmArk, and a manipulator of space. Ophelia finds herself often lost in the many altered spaces and compass roses.

Thorn's grandmother attempts to murder Madam Hildegarde with a basket of tainted oranges. Ophelia is framed for this crime but is cleared off suspicion as Hildegarde survives the incident. Ophelia realises she can trust very few people in her new home. As Berenilde takes a role in the Opera, Ophelia finally catches a glimpse of the daunting but beautiful Farouk. He is hedonistic, apathetic, and intimidating, constantly surrounded by women and smoking his hookah.

During her troubling time at Clairdelune and after enduring a threatening run in with Thorn's family, the violent Dragons, Berenilde discloses to Ophelia the true purpose of her marriage to Thorn, which

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is the Ceremony of The Gift, a marital rite in which the couple inherits each other's power. Thorn chose an arranged marriage with an Animist for the purpose of inheriting the reading ability so he may 'Read' Farouk's Book, a book exactly like Artemis' on Anima.

After caring for Rosaline as she falls victim to an illusion, Ophelia wakes to discover the troubling news that every member of The Dragons, besides Berenilde, Thorn and His Grandmother, have perished in a 'hunting accident' which is suspected to be a massacre carried out by 'The Knight' a child from the Mirage clan, jealous of Berenilde's unborn child. It is decided upon these revelations that Ophelia and Berenilde will be placed under the protection of Archibald's family and Family Spirit Farouk on the higher floors of the Citaceleste.

To conclude the first instalment of the quartet, Ophelia is made aware of her family travelling to see her at The Pole. She must face the prospect of revealing the true details of her impending marriage and the tumultuous way of life on The Pole. Ophelia is determined to retain her independence and has come to appreciate the freedom Mirror Visiting has afforded her, especially as she must assume her new role in The Pole's court as the despised Thorn's fiancé and an outsider.

Analysis

The first instalment of the *Mirror Visitor* series, *A Winter's Promise*, is heavily influenced by Classical Antiquity, as seen through the allusions to, and use of, significant Greek mythology and Latin. Thus, endowing the novel and series with a classical atmosphere.

Ophelia's journey, both physical and emotional, in *A Winter's Promise* can be considered through the classical scope as well as the conventions of a coming-of-age narrative. There are parallels that can be drawn between Ophelia's character development and the story of Persephone. Ophelia's established life on her home ark denotes a childish, stagnant comfort that is soon disrupted by her forced engagement and journey to The Pole, like the abduction of Persephone and her removal from the familiar safety of her relationship with her mother Demeter. Persephone's resonance throughout the literary canon particularly with the maturation of young female protagonists is again reflected in Ophelia's journey (see further reading: Blackford). Ophelia's forced engagement to Thorn parallels the abduction of

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Persephone by Hades and is the impetus for the immense changes she undergoes throughout the remainder of the novel. Although she is defiant and resistant to her removal from the Pole, this is the key transitional moment in her life that pushes her into a mature role. Just as Persephone occupies the liminal space between childhood and womanhood, the underworld, and the natural world; Ophelia is similarly traversing a socially liminal space. Ophelia's seclusion from her family and her arrival into a precarious and unfamiliar society at The Pole causes her to mature and through her maturation she becomes secretive towards her chaperone Godmother and her family back on Anima. Ophelia is recognising her own maturity as she believes herself able to manage the difficulties of her new life and does not want to worry her family in their place of security. This reticence that she develops is symptomatic of her occupation of this transitional phase from girl to woman as she, like Persephone, is cycling between social spaces with fluxing expectations of maturity, this ultimately allowing them both to mature. Ophelia's journey is reflective of the mythic pattern of Persephone that is perpetuated in girls' fantasy literature.

The most significant example of classical antiquity within the novel is the Family Spirit of Anima, Artemis. Sharing her name with the Greek goddess of the hunt and childbirth, Artemis, as she is depicted in *A Winter's Promise*, is the matriarch of the large family-based community on Anima. Whilst the Greek figure of Artemis is traditionally depicted as the Virgin Goddess, this Artemis is portrayed as the sole distant ancestor of every citizen of Anima. No explanation is given as to how Artemis began her lineage or how Animist society originated, this creates a distance between the Animists and their Family Spirit; therefore, a resonance arises between the traditional figure of Artemis and her namesake in the novel. The resonance being the maternal similarities or differences between the two figures, Artemis in the novel is shown to be a very distant figure in the eyes of the Animists, her maternal instinct is lacking despite her being the 'Grandmother' of every Animist. Artemis, the goddess, is known to be a figure associated with childbirth and midwifery despite being chaste herself and never bearing children. Despite these key differences these two figures share a commonality in being intrinsic to the creation and continuation of families and societies. Just as Greek mythology placed Artemis as central to childbirth and her role in assisting mothers during labour, Artemis in the novel is also central to the origins and continuation of Anima and its people. Despite the

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Artemis of the novel being a forebear to a whole community, her lack of maternal instinct and distance from her descendants bridges the gap between the traditional depiction of Artemis and this new interpretation potentially reverting Dabos' Artemis to her maidenhood. Other similarities include: a general masculinity as Dabos' Artemis is shown to wear masculine coded clothing, "Thus, she only had men's clothes tailor made to fit her great height." (Dabos, 72), just as Greek Artemis is often referred to as 'manlike'*. The frequent equating of the Greek Artemis with Selene (the Titan goddess of the moon) is reflected in Dabos' Artemis being depicted as a keen astronomer who spends most of her time in her mountaintop observatory surveying the night sky**; her mountaintop sanctuary also resonates with Greek Artemis' request of her Father, Zeus, to be the custodian of all mountains***. Therefore, Dabos' Artemis is central in establishing the classical links in *A Winter's Promise*.

The construction of a classical atmosphere in *A Winter's Promise* is partly found in the world-building of the novel, the most significant instance being Ophelia's home Ark of Anima. The Latin term 'Anima' is defined as a term for soul, spirit, or vital principal, applying this classical definition to the land depicted in the novel reveals the considerable influence of classical antiquity. The term resonates on multiple levels within the world-building of the novel but foremost with the significance of Anima being Ophelia's home. If the Latin definition of anima is primarily a term for the soul this can be applied to the notion that Anima is home for Ophelia, which is confirmed by the construction of the type of society which the Animists make up; it is a society firmly based in the upholding of the family unit, a view that all citizens are extended family. Furthermore, in the imagery and language employed to evoke the familiar and comfortable quality of life on Anima, "In the russet glow of this late autumn, people were leading their daily lives. A nanny pushed a pram while blushing at the admiring whistles of workmen up scaffolding. School children munched their roast chestnuts on the way home. A messenger rushed along the pavement with a parcel under his arm." (p. 49). Anima is symbolic of Ophelia's soul and furthermore the soul of the broader world in the novel, as Anima differs from the other Arks in its comfortable depiction and societal structure, particularly when juxtaposed with the cold, political tension of the clan-based society of The Pole.

The Latin definition of anima holds further significance when considered through the scope of the powers that are inherited by

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Animists and their broader significance within the plot. The primary power inherited by Artemis' descendants is the ability to 'animate' inanimate objects, thus giving a life or soul to previously stagnant objects, this is exemplified by Ophelia's scarf with whom she shares a special bond like that of a pet and its owner. The powers that spread from this core ability include Ophelia's own ability to read the history of objects with touch, passing through mirrors and other minor skills such as object repair. These powers are guided by that central Latin definition of anima, referring to the vital principal or spirit, as the animists spread life and spirit to the objects around them, furthermore, indicating the symbolic nature of Anima as the 'soul' of the broader world which Ophelia inhabits as these powers and the Animist society differ greatly from the kinds of abilities that are inherited by the citizens of other Arks, particularly the illusion centred powers of The Pole. The life intrinsic to Anima is contrasted with the false and illusory quality of life on The Pole, thus imbuing Anima with a unique position and soul-like quality within the world of *A Winter's Promise*.

The classical reception displayed in *A Winter's Promise* illustrates how Christelle Dabos has harnessed the mythic patterns of classical traditions, figures, and language to evoke and enhance the fantasy conventions of young adult literature.

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* "390 Schol. Genev. Il. 21. 483 (i 210 Nicole). Χρύσιππος ἐν τῷ περὶ ἀρχαίας φυσικῆς δεικνὺς ὅτι σελήνη ἡ Ἄρτεμις καὶ τὰ περὶ τόκους δὲ εἰς αὐτὴν <ἀναφέρων, λέγει ἐν> ταῖς πανσελήνοις οὐ μόνον τὰς γυναῖκας εὐτοκωτάτας εἶναι ἀλλὰ γίγνεσθαι <ῥᾳδίως τὰ ζῷα> πάντα (fr. 748 v. Arnim ii 212)

390. Scholiast on *Iliad* 21.483. Chrysippus in his *Old Physics*, where he shows that Artemis is the moon and credits it with an influence on childbirth, says that at the full moon not only do women have the easiest labour but all animals have an easy birth." Alcaeus, fr. 390 in *Greek Lyric. Vol. 1 Sappho, Alcaeus*, trans. David A. Campbell, Loeb Classical Library 142, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press and William Heinemann Ltd, 1982, 406–407.

** "[The child Artemis requests privileges from her father Zeus:] δὸς δέ μοι οὔρεα πάντα (...) οὔρεσιν οἰκήσω (...)

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	And give to me all mountains (…) On the mountains will I dwell (…)'" Callimachus, *Hymn 3 to Artemis* in Callimachus and Lycophron, Aratus, trans. Alexander William Mair, Loeb Classical Library, London: William Heinemann and New York: G. Putnam's Sons, 1921, 60–63. *** Seneca, *Phaedra*, 54–56: *Ades en comiti, diva virago,* *cuius regno* *pars terrarum secreta vacat* [The hunter Hippolytos prays to Diana-Artemis:] *'And do thou be with thy worshiper,* *O goddess of the chase, whose rule* *Extends o'er all the secret haunts,* *Of earth;* *The Tragedies of Seneca*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press and T. Fisher Unwin, 1907, 170 (accessed: July 28, 2022).
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Arcadia Artemis Hero(es) Labyrinth Latin (Language) Persephone
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Coming of age Disobedience Expectations Family Femininity Freedom Hierarchy History Homesickness Humanity Isolation/loneliness Magic powers Maturity Romance Social class War
Further Reading	Blackford, Holly, *The Myth of Persephone in Girls' Fantasy Literature*, Children's Literature and Culture 80, London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2014. James, Edward, and Farah Mendlesohn, eds., *The Cambridge*

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	Companion to Fantasy Literature, Cambridge University Press, 2012.
Addenda	Dabos, Christelle, *A Winter's Promise* (Mirror Visitor #1), trans. Hildegarde Serle, New York, 2018, 491 pp. ISBN: 9781609454838.

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