Mary Appleby, "Entry on: The Memory of Babel [La Mémoire de Babel] (The Mirror Visitor Quartet [La Passe-Miroir], 3) 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/1475. Entry version as of November 07, 2026.

Christelle Dabos

The Memory of Babel [La Mémoire de Babel] (The Mirror Visitor Quartet [La Passe-Miroir], 3)

France (2017)

TAGS: Artemis Babylon Helen Janus Latin (Language) Norse Mythology Pollux Seven Wonders of the Ancient World





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

General information	
Title of the work	The Memory of Babel [La Mémoire de Babel] (The Mirror Visitor Quartet [La Passe-Miroir], 3)
Country of the First Edition	France
Country/countries of popularity	France, Europe, Australia, USA
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First Edition Details	Christelle Dabos, *La Mémoire de Babel*. Paris: Gallimard Jeunesse, 2017, 496 pp.
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Genre	Fantasy fiction, Novels
Target Audience	Young adults (14+)
Author of the Entry	Mary Appleby, University of New England, maryappleby99@gmail.com
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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

Russian: *Память Вавилона* (*Сквозь зеркала* #3) [Pamyat' Vavilona], trans. Irina Volevich, Elena Morozova, Moskva: KompasGid, 2018.

German: *Das Gedächtnis von Babel* (*Die Spiegelreisende*, #3), trans. Amelie Thoma, Berlin: Insel Verlag, 2019.

Hungarian: *Bábel emlékezete* (*A tükörjáró*, #3), trans. Zsófia Molnár, Budapest: Kolibri, 2019.

Italian: *La Memoria di Babel* (*L'Attraversaspecchi*, #3), trans. Alberto Bracci Testasecca, Rona: Edizioni E/O, 2019.

Czech: *Paměť Babylonu* (*Projít zrcadlem*, #3), trans. Drahoslava Janderová, Baobab, 2020.

Polish: *Pamięć Babel* (*Lustrzanna*, #3), trans. Paweł Łapiński, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Entliczek, 2020.

Portuguese: *A Memória de Babel* (*A Passa-espelhos*, #3), trans. Sofia Soter, Morro Branco, 2020.

Slovenian: *Spomin Babilona* (*Zrcalka*, #3), trans. Živa Čebulj, Ljubljana: Sanje, 2020.

Spanish: *La memoria de Babel* (*La pasaespejos*, #3), trans. Jorge Salgar, Panamericana Editorial, 2020.

English: *The Memory of Babel* (*Mirror Visitor*, #3), trans. Hildegarde Serle, Europa Editions, 2020. Second Edition, 2021.

Dutch: *Het Geheugen van Babel* (*De Spiegelpassante*, #3), trans. Eef Gratama, Luitingh-Sijthoff, 2021.

Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs

Mirror Visitor Book #1: *A Winter's Promise* [Les Fiancés de l'hiver].

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

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

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Summary

The Memory of Babel, follows two strands, the story of Ophelia and the story of Victoria (Berenilde and Farouk's infant daughter).

On Anima two years since Thorn's disappearance, Ophelia receives a visit from Archibald, Victoria, Fox, and Gail. To assist Ophelia's search, Archibald transports her to Babel (The Ark of Helen and Pollux, Mistress and Master of the senses), where she believes Thorn is, whilst they return to The Pole in search of a route to LandmArk (The Ark of Janus, Master of Space).

Ophelia arrives in Babel, determined to find Thorn without raising suspicion from God. Ophelia adopts the name Eulalia. With the help of Ambrose (Lazarus' son), Ophelia learns about the Memorial; a structure predating the rupture said to house humanity's memory, Babel's 'Index Vocabulum Prohibitorum' and the dress code. Helen and Pollux divide Babel society. Sons of Pollux are descended from Pollux; Godchildren of Helen are non-citizens, as Helen was unable to create descendants.

Ophelia continues her search at the Memorial. After being suspected of stealing, Ophelia learns about the 'Secretarium', which contains the oldest records and a strongroom concealing 'the ultimate truth'. In hopes of gaining access, Ophelia decides to enrol as an apprentice forerunner (specialists in archiving the memorial).

At the Secretarium, Ophelia meets Family Spirit Helen, who is affected by gigantism, and uses a tentacular mechanism that assists her with vision and organisation. Helen accepts Ophelia as an apprentice and introduces her to Elizabeth, the woman in charge of Ophelia's cohort of forerunners. During her studies, Ophelia is singled out by Lady Septima, an instructor, suspected sentinel of God, and enforcer of Babel's strict rules. She also learns of a suspicious death at the Memorial. Ophelia then meets Pollux, who is physically 'harmonious' and extremely kind, though controlled by the Lords of LUX (highest officials of Babel, suspected sentinels of God). After Ophelia's reader's gloves are stolen by her classmates, she visits Professor Wolf, a fellow reader, at the suggestion of Lady Septima's son, Octavio.

Ophelia continues her training and begins proper research into God. After a confrontation with her classmate, the ambitious Mediana,

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Ophelia learns that Thorn is in Babel, Mediana agreeing to reveal his location only after Ophelia attends one of Fearless' gatherings (Babelian vigilante). At the underground gathering, Fearless tells Ophelia his great-grandmother Hildegarde used the symbol of an orange because of an ancient story about golden apples which granted profound knowledge, he threatens Ophelia, and she is forced to leave.

During Ophelia's absence from the Memorial, Mediana suffers an 'accident' and Ophelia must replace her in Sir Henry's reading group. Sir Henry is revealed to be Thorn. Once alone with Ophelia, Thorn confirms Ophelia's suspicions of the Lords of LUX as God's accomplices, particularly The Genealogists (leaders of the Lords). In her role as Mediana's replacement, Ophelia 'reads' the caretaker's log of the young family spirits. It tells of an unidentified family spirit. Thorn reveals he is searching for a text that allows the reader to become God's equal, but this log is not it. Ophelia dreams of the Caretaker, he says whoever seeks 'E.G' will find the other family spirit. Ophelia realises E.G. is the author of the book she was suspected of stealing on her first day in Babel. Censors had incinerated E. G.'s books by the time Ophelia was able to look for them. Ophelia, late to her duties after being trapped in the incinerator and freed by an unknown person, loses her position as Mediana's replacement.

With Octavio, Ophelia investigates the Memorial accidents. They are confronted by Fearless, and a fight ensues. Fearless is killed by an unknown assailant and Wolf rescues the pair from the growing danger. Wolf reveals E. G's books are relics predating the rupture. Helen summons Ophelia and Octavio. As punishment for the altercation, Ophelia is sent to the isolation chamber. From here, She mirror travels into the strongroom and discovers the unknown family spirit is a protector of the memorial.

Ophelia leaves isolation and meets with Thorn and reveals she stole E. G's book when she arrived in Babel. At Ambrose's house, they find Lazarus who is revealed to be God's servant. Ophelia reads the book and E.G is discovered to be Eulalia Gonde, now known as God. The unknown family spirit confronts Ophelia. He is the cause of the accidents at the Memorial and had saved Ophelia from the incinerator. A plate on his forehead, which controls him just as the family spirit's Books control them, is shot by Fearless' child, killing the spirit.

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Threaded throughout the novel is Victoria's story which takes place on The Pole, occurring simultaneously with Ophelia's story. Victoria, a non-verbal child who enjoys drawing and spending time with Archibald, has inherited the ability of exiting her physical body and roaming freely and invisibly. In her incorporeal state, Victoria can see the powers of others as a shadow. At Berenilde's manor, Cunegonde (an illusionist) visits and when she leaves, Victoria uses her power to follow. Victoria notices shadows surrounding Cunegonde and soon discovers the real Cunegonde dead and this imposter is revealed to be God. Victoria, scared, returns to her body at the manor.

A traumatised Victoria ceases to use her power. Instead, she illustrates the shadows attached to God. Fearful for Victoria, Berenilde calls upon Farouk. Victoria is afraid of Farouk but when Cunegonde arrives during Farouk's visit. Farouk, able to see Victoria in her incorporeal state and sense her fear, commands Cunegonde to leave the manor. Archibald arrives with news of a route to LandmArk. Victoria, wanting to be with Archibald, follows him. Victoria accompanies Archibald, Fox, and Gail to LandmArk. Victoria sees that God has stolen Fox's identity and now has access to LandmArk.

The novel ends with a radio broadcast alerting citizens that Babel's minor arks have begun to collapse, the result of Ophelia unleashing The Other (an unknown apocalyptic entity), as God warned.

Analysis

The Memory of Babel, adopts and modifies elements of classical antiquity to enhance characterisation and fantasy conventions, and expand the series' intricate world-building.

The Memory of Babel introduces the family spirits of Babel: Helen and Pollux. Drawing from classical antiquity, their names evoke the classical figures: Helen of Troy (Helene) and her brother Pollux (Polydeukes), the children of Zeus and Leda*. When considered through the scope of their classical counterparts, Dabos' characterisation reveals underlying themes of power, beauty, and gender ideology. Dabos' Helen is not a traditionally beautiful woman: many parts of her body are affected by gigantism, and she is described as "a huge caricature brought to life." (p. 99). This is a clear contrast to the traditional image of Helen of Troy who "excelled all women in beauty,"** and whose extreme physical beauty is represented as the impetus for the Trojan war***. The irony of these

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descriptions is bolstered by the function and treatment of physicality within each figure's respective story; particularly when contextualised within the androcentric milieu of each story. Dabos' Helen is saliently juxtaposed not only against her classical namesake but, when contextualised within Dabos' novel, against her twin Pollux. When describing Pollux, Dabos states, "The lines of his body and face were as harmonious as his twin's were chaotic." (144). This dissonance between the twins' appearances indicates the underlying function of characterisation as a thematic tool. The favourability of Pollux's harmonious appearance shrouds the reality of his character as one beholden to the Lords of LUX despite his genuine paternal interest in his descendants. Helen, overlooked for disappointing the expectations of her gender by being both physically unique and unable to create descendants, rises as the more cunning of the two. This speaks to the underpinning theme that beauty may grant superficial power but is not an indicator of power in its truest sense.

This relationship between beauty and power binds Dabos' Helen to Helen of Troy as they both gain social and political power by their physicality. Homeric Helen's beauty renders her both dangerous and invaluable to the men of the Trojan war (See further reading: Worman). Yet it is this physicality which restricts her agency within this androcentric setting; her beauty is powerful, yet it does not grant her individual power (See further reading: Blondell). This issue of agency and beauty is answered by Dabos' Helen as her chaotic appearance grants her agency within an otherwise restricted society, this endows her physicality with power like that of Helen of Troy despite their vastly contrasting physical qualities. The emphasis placed on physicality as power underpins the classical resonance within Dabos' third novel, allowing for an exploration of classical themes through a young-adult fantasy scope.

The Memory of Babel expands the series' intricate worldbuilding as a new setting is introduced. The ark of Babel functions as an extension of the fantasy setting and plot, and a significant symbol of classical antiquity. Dabos' depiction of Babel, and the central setting of the Memorial, denotes a classical atmosphere reminiscent of both: Hanging Gardens of Babylon and the biblical Tower of Babel. The name Babel is the primary signifier of these classical influences; however, this is reinforced by the description of the ark itself. Dabos describes Babel as, "A multitude of floating islands… some were large enough to harbor a town," in which, "Architecture and vegetation were as one, as if the plants and stones were interwoven" (55). The

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splintered arks of Babel are linked by a network of bridges, aqueducts, and flying trains. This fantasy setting recalls the Hanging Gardens of Babylon as similarities arise between the composition of Dabos' worldbuilding and descriptions of the gardens in historical texts. In Strabo's *Geography*, the gardens at Babylon consist of, "vaulted terraces, raised one above another, and resting upon cube-shaped pillars (…) filled with earth to allow trees of the largest size to be planted."**** This combining of architecture and plant-life is directly reflected in Dabos' Babel and enhanced by the application of fantasy conventions upon a classical symbol. Babel itself can be viewed as a fantasy re-imagining of the Hanging Gardens, as the plant-laden floating islands evoke imagery of suspended gardens. Dabos elaborates upon the Babylonian gardens with conventions of fantasy worldbuilding by negotiating the paraxial space between the familiar or real and the unreal (See further reading: Jackson). This negotiation occurs between the classical elements and the fantasy that Dabos has applied to them. Dabos has transformed the stationary vaulted gardens of Babylon into floating islands of vegetation, thus, enhancing a classical symbol with conventions of fantasy. This is also true of the Memorial and its link to the biblical Tower of Babel. The Memorial is "a spiralling tower, topped with a glass dome, stood on a floating island barely big enough to support it" (62), pre-dating the primordial event of the series known as 'The Rupture' (p. 78). The Memorial's centralisation within the plot speaks to its significance and to the importance of classical influence within the series. The memorial is reminiscent of the Tower of Babel, not only in its structure but its historical function within the novel. The theme of origin links the two settings as the biblical Babel mythologises the origins of the world's languages5, and the Memorial pre-dates the primordial rupture and housed the Family Spirits' before they were scattered to re-form humanity, just as the Christian God scattered the people of the tower to spread their languages*****. Both the ark of Babel and the central location of the Memorial serve as classical signifiers within the paraxial space of the immersive fantasy. Thus, extending the influence of classical antiquity within the worldbuilding of the series.

The classical atmosphere of Dabos' *The Memory of Babel* is upheld by the classical elements of the novel and plot. This atmosphere is a result of less explored but highly significant classical elements that combine to create a classical tone and quality within the setting, characters, and plot of the novel. Dabos uses Latin in the naming of

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characters and sectors of Babel society to maintain the classical undertones of the novel. Lady Septima and her son Octavio are examples of how Latin has been used to reveal deeper meanings within the novel. Septima, from the Latin septimus (seven), and Octavio, from the Latin octavus (eighth), denote not only the familial relationship of Lady Septima to her son but also speak to Octavio's own character arc within the novel. Octavio struggles against his mother's expectation that he will succeed through the ranks of Babel bureaucracy and eventually inherit her role as a Lord of LUX (p. 331). The use of Latin denotes the line of succession and tradition that both Octavio and his mother are a part of. Babel's society is also depicted using Latin; this is most significant in the "Index Vocabulum Prohibitorum" which translates to "list of prohibited words". The index is a significant facet of the strict Babel regime and employing Latin to label this element of the fictional society enhances the novel's classical tone. This is also repeated in the senior most faction of Babel; the Lords of LUX. Lux in Latin denotes light and the symbol of this ruling faction within the novel is a sun. The naming and symbol of the Lords is a misnomer for the actual motives of the group which is supressing Babel's citizens and upholding God's will. These less salient but significant examples of classical antiquity within *The Memory of Babel* uphold the greater instances of classical influence and contribute to the innate classical atmosphere and tone of the novel.

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* Pseudo-Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 224: "Qui facti sunt ex mortalibus immortales. (...) Castor et Pollux, Helenae fratres, Iovis et Ledae filii."
"Mortals who were made immortal (...) Castor and Pollux, brothers of Helen, sons of Jove and Leda."

** Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* 4. 63. 2: "(...) τὴν Λήδας καὶ Διὸς ᾽Ελένην, δεκαετῆ μὲν τὴν ἡλικίαν οὖσαν, εὐπρεπείᾳ δὲ πασῶν διαφέρουσαν.
"(...) Helen, the daughter of Leda and Zeus, who was only ten years of age, but excelled all women in beauty." Diodorus of Sicily vol. 3, trans. Charles Henry Oldfather, Loeb Classical Library LCL 340, London: William Heinemann Ltd and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993, 16–17 (ed. pr. 1939).

*** Homer, *The Iliad*, Book 3. 156–158:
'οὐ νέμεσις Τρῶας καὶ ἐϋκνήμιδας Ἀχαιοὺς

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τοιῇδ᾽ ἀμφὶ γυναικὶ πολὺν χρόνον ἄλγεα πάσχειν:
αἰνῶς ἀθανάτῃσι θεῇς εἰς ὦπα ἔοικεν:

“No blame that the Trojans and strong grieved Achaeans have suffered so long on account of such a woman; terribly does she seem like the immortal goddesses to look on.” trans. Caroline Alexander.

**** Strabo, *Geography* 16. 1. 5: "διόπερ τῶν ἑπτὰ θεαμάτων λέγεται καὶ τοῦτο καὶ ὁ κρεμαστὸς κῆπος, ἔχων ἐν τετραγώνῳ σχήματι ἑκάστην πλευρὰν τεττάρων πλέθρων: συνέχεται δὲ ψαλιδώμασι καμαρωτοῖς, ἐπὶ πεττῶν ἱδρυμένοις κυβοειδῶν ἄλλοις ἐπ᾽ ἄλλοις: οἱ δὲ πεττοὶ κοῖλοι πλήρεις γῆς, ὥστε δέξασθαι φυτὰ δένδρων τῶν μεγίστων, ἐξ ὀπτῆς πλίνθου καὶ ἀσφάλτου κατεσκευασμένοι καὶ αὐτοὶ καὶ αἱ ψαλίδες καὶ τὰ καμαρώματα.

“(…) and it is on this account that this and the hanging garden are called one of the Seven Wonders of the World. The garden is quadrangular in shape, and each side is four plethra in length. It consists of arched vaults, which are situated, one after another, on checkered, cube-like foundations. The checkered foundations, which are hollowed out, are covered so deep with earth that they admit of the largest of trees, having been constructed of baked brick and asphalt – the foundations themselves and the vaults and the arches.” *The Geography of Strabo* vol. VII, trans. Horace Leonard Jones, Loeb Classical Library 241, London: William Heinemann Ltd and New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1930, 198–199.

***** *Genesis* 11. 9. (King James Version): “Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.”

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Artemis Babylon Helen Janus Latin (Language) Norse Mythology Pollux Seven Wonders of the Ancient World
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant	Authority Gender expectations/construction History Knowledge Love Memory Names Relationships Romance Social class

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Further Reading

Blondell, Ruby, "Third Cheerleader from the Left: from Homer's Helen to Helen of Troy", *Classical Receptions Journal* 1.1 (2009): 4–22.

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Addenda

Christelle Dabos, *The Memory of Babel* (*Mirror Visitor Book* #3), trans. Hildegarde Serle, New York, 2020, 508 pp. ISBN: 9781609456139

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