Elizabeth Hale, "Entry on: Zeus on the Loose by John Dougherty , Georgien Overwater ", peer-reviewed by Miriam Riverlea. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/489. Entry version as of November 02, 2026.

John Dougherty , Georgien Overwater

Zeus on the Loose

United Kingdom (2004)

TAGS: Gods Iliad Trojan War Zeus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Zeus on the Loose
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2004
First Edition Details	John Dougherty, Georgien Overwater, *Zeus on the Loose*. London: Young Corgi Books (a Division of Random House Children's Books), 2004, 90 pp.
ISBN	9780552550819
Genre	Fiction, Humor, Illustrated works, Mythological fiction
Target Audience	Children (Middle-Grade Reader)
Author of the Entry	Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@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



John Dougherty , b. 1964
(Author)

John Dougherty was born in Larne, in Northern Ireland. He is a writer of children's books. In the 1990s and early 2000s he was a teacher at Hillbrook Primary School, in London. He has written a number of series of children's picture books and readers, usually with comic themes, and some with mythical or fairy-tale elements, including the *Bansi O'Hara* series about a girl with connections to faery folk; picture books on retellings of folktales, such as *Finn MacCool and the Giant's Causeway*, *Twice Upon a Time*, *The Story of Sir Dave* (drawing on Arthurian legend), and adaptations of Shakespeare plays such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream and The Tempest*. He has also written a trio of books about Zeus (*Zeus on the Loose* (2004), *Zeus to the Rescue* (2007), and *Zeus Sorts it Out* (2011)). He lives in Stroud, Gloucestershire.

Source:

Official website (accessed: October 1, 2018)

Bio prepared by 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.



Georgien Overwater , b. 1958
(Illustrator)

Georgien Overwater is a Belgian-Dutch illustrator of children's books. She was born in Gorichem, and from a child was interested in drawing. She trained at the Art Academy in Arnhem and has illustrated many children's books around the world, including animated films (with Paul Driessen, and Sesame Street), the children's series Floor, with Marjon Hoffman, the *Dr Procession* series by Jo Nesbo, and *Munkel Trough* by Jan Foxley. She illustrated the three *Zeus* books, the *Jack Slater Monster Investigator* and *Niteracy Hour* books, by John Dougherty. She lives in Amsterdam.

Sources:

Official website (accessed: October 1, 2018)

Profile at the leopold.nl (accessed: October 1, 2018)

Bio prepared by 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.

Additional information

Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs

Zeus to the Rescue (London: Young Corgi, 2007)

Zeus Sorts it Out (London: Young Corgi, 2011)

Summary

In this chapter-book with illustrations, a boy named Alex accidentally summons Zeus, king of the gods, into his life, when he makes a 'temple (out of loo rolls and a cornflakes box),' as a class project. In the style of comic intrusion fantasy, Zeus causes mayhem. He demands sacrifices from Alex as his 'high priest' in the form of midnight bacon sandwiche. He borrows Alex's mother's best night dress when he spills coffee on his robes, transforming into a hamster when adults are near,. He causes the children at Alex's school to re-enact scenes from the Trojan War in the playground. Alex's friend Charlie gets in trouble with Miss Wise the teacher for missing class; Alex and Zeus smuggle him back into the school inside the school's vaulting horse. Ultimately, Alex performs a sacrifice so that Zeus can go home, giving him trinkets from his home as souvenirs for the other gods (e. g. "for Dionysus, god of wine and happiness, a smiley-face badge; for Hestia, goddess of the hearth and the heart-fire, a lump of barbecue charcoal" (p. 84)). Zeus disappears, leaving Alex a golden necklace with a thunderbolt on it, and a note saying "Dear Alex, Just a note to say thanks. You weren't a bad High Priest for an eight-year-old. Keep this thunderbolt safe and I'll bring you luck. And think of me every time you eat a bag of roast bull flavoured crisps. Yours, Zeus. High King of the Gods of Olympus. P.S. Keep the hamster-cage for me, just in case . . ." (p. 89).

Analysis

This is an example of comic intrusion fantasy, in which the mythical elements intrude into the real life of modern characters. Zeus is summoned through a portal, in this case the temple made of toilet paper rolls and a box of cardboard. The comedy of the story comes from Zeus's disruptive behaviour, and Alex's attempts to keep it secret. Zeus's arrogance as the king of the gods is employed to comic effect, eg. in appropriating Alex's mother's nightdress (with a light-hearted send-up of modern ideas about ancient Greek clothing). Zeus's enjoyment of meddling in the lives of mortals is a key element

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.

	of the story, including manipulating the school children to re-enact aspects of the Trojan War. Comic illustrations (in a style that seems influenced by Quentin Blake) add to the light aspects of the book.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Gods Iliad Trojan War Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Family Friendship School
Addenda	The phrase "Zeus on the Loose" appears to be quite popular, appearing in Terry Deary's 1998 comic non-fiction book, and a board game published by Gamewright, as well as an episode of Cyberchase, a US-Canadian PBS time-travel cartoon.

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.