Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: Medea the Enchantress (Goddess Girls, 23) by Joan Holub, Suzanne Williams ", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/521. Entry version as of July 12, 2026.

Joan Holub , Suzanne Williams

Medea the Enchantress (Goddess Girls, 23)

United States (2017)

TAGS: Aeëtes Aphrodite Apollo Ares Argonauts Artemis Athena Circe Eros Golden Fleece Harpies Heracles Hercules Hylas Jason Orpheus Pheme Phineus Poseidon

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

General information	
Title of the work	Medea the Enchantress (Goddess Girls, 23)
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2017
First Edition Details	Joan Holub and Suzanne Williams, *Goddess Girls: Medea the Enchantress*. New York: Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division, Aladdin Press, 2017, 256 pp.
ISBN	9781481470179
Genre	Alternative histories (Fiction), Bildungsromans (Coming-of-age fiction), Fiction, Humor, Mythological fiction, Novels, School story*
Target Audience	Children (Older children, 8–12 years old)
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 Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaoundé 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.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

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 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

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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?

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 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

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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.

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

Suzanne Williams , b. 1953
(Author)

Suzanne Williams is an American prolific children's author and former

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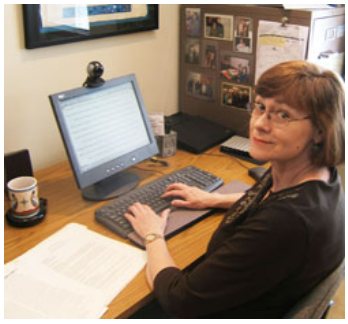

Courtesy of the Author from her personal website.

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

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

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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 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?

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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

Summary

In this installment, we meet the twelve year-old Medea, princess of Colchis. Medea's father is very strict: "he wouldn't let her hang out with kids he didn't approve of." (p. 11). While the king appears severe and controlling, he means well and just wishes to protect his only child. In this way, the authors try to explain to their readers why some parents appear stricter, namely not because they do not love their children, but quite the opposite. Nevertheless, Medea thinks that her father is too strict, and that he does not trust her. By the end of the quest, both father and daughter will arrive to a mutual understanding. The loss of the fleece will strengthen their relationship.

Medea attends Enchantment Academy, but is invited by her aunt, Circe, to visit MOA. Due to an accident, Medea finds herself on board of the Argo, with the other Argonauts, on a quest to steal her father's golden fleece. Many changes have been made to the original myths in this version. The Argonauts' quest is portrayed as a comic adventure story, and is not too frightening.

Analysis

Medea is a complicated character. The ancient sources were not favourable towards her, representing her as mysterious, barbarian, and cruel. However, in the almost-teenage world of *Goddess Girls*, Medea is a teenage girl, like everyone else, who tries to live up to her father, Aeëtes', severe standards and at the same time be a teenager.

The scary witch, Medea of mythology, becomes here a teenage who goes to enchantment school. She also suffers insecurities, especially due to the taunts of her "friend", Glauce. While this book narrates the adventures of the Argonauts in a humorous and safe way for children, it is more a story about Medea finding her own voice and becoming mature, than it is a tale about Jason and his friends. Medea also possesses a special power, the ability to scorch with her eyes. This is the only intimidating aspect of her character. Yet, once she understands how to use this power for good and to control it, she sets herself free as well: "she didn't rush her special fry-power or try to imprison it either. And for once she didn't summon anger in order to set it free. Instead she tried to call up her talent with a determination born of the new confidence she felt in herself." (p. 245). Medea's anger is manifested by this scorching power, another visual

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manifestation in the series of teenage angst and insecurity. Yet she learns not to hide it, but to approach this power from a position of confidence and this is what makes all the difference. Self-confidence is the key. Medea is her own person; she is not overshadowed by Jason or Glauce, but is given the chance to succeed on her own.

Noted changes from the mythological Argonautica are as follows: The girls at Lemnos treat them as celebrities and want to sell souvenirs of them, in another comment on the commercialisation of heroes. (See the entry on *Calliope the Muse*). By accident, Heracles falls in love with his shield, Hylas (the authors did not dare to portray homosexual love, even in an accidental case). The Harpies are the well-known owners of the café from the Immortal Market place, Iris' sisters and Apollo promise to make the group's voyage into a musical. Medea, as in the original story, helps Jason, especially after being accidently struck by Eros' arrow and falling in love with him. It is stressed that Medea has no real feeling for Jason, who is actually more interested in her friend, Glauce. This corresponds to the original story in which Medea was enchanted by Eros as well, although of course in Euripides' tragedy, she was seemingly in love with Jason, who left her for Glauce. Yet, here, Glauce is the villain from the start, who is in fact jealous of Medea and always tries to steal her ideas. Thus the authors are seemingly trying to purposely make Medea the heroine of the story rather than the villain, giving her a perhaps deserved second chance.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aeëtes Aphrodite Apollo Ares Argonauts Artemis Athena Circe Eros Golden Fleece Harpies Heracles Hercules Hylas Jason Orpheus Pheme Phineus Poseidon
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adolescence Appearances Character traits Communication Conflict Emotions Family Friendship Gaining understanding Girls Heroism Humour Identity Individuality Integrity Journeys Judgement Learning Magic Magic powers Names Parents (and children) Peers Prediction/prophecy Relationships Respect School Self Success and failure Truth and lies

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