Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: Sephy's Story by Julia Green, Teresa Murfin", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Susan Deacy. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/919. Entry version as of November 07, 2026.

Julia Green , Teresa Murfin

Sephy's Story

United Kingdom (2007)

TAGS: Demeter Hermes Persephone Pluto / Plouton





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

General information	
Title of the work	Sephy's Story
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2007
First Edition Details	Julia Green, *Sephy's Story*, "White Wolves: Myths and Legends". A & C Black, Bloomsbury Publishing, Kindle Edition, 2007, 48 pp.
Genre	Adaptations, Myths
Target Audience	Children (Children, level 3 reading, 5–8 yrs)
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 Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk

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



Courtesy of the Author.

Julia Green (Author)

Julia Green is a British young-adult author who resides in Bath. Amongst her books are *Blue Moon*, *Baby Blue*. From the book (*Sephy's Story*): "(Julia) lectures in creative writing at Bath Spa University. She is programme leader for the MA in Writing for Young People."

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?

My book *Sephy's Story* was commissioned by an educational publisher, for a series for children about Greek Myths. I was able to choose which myth to retell, and so I chose one I have always loved, about Persephone, a story of renewal, about the coming of spring and why we have winter. The challenge was how to tell this story in a way that was accessible for a very young child, without being too dark or frightening. The most difficult part to adapt was when Pluto "seizes" Persephone. I changed Persephone's name to Sephy to make her seem more like a contemporary character, for a child reader, and because the name is easier to say/read. I also had to write very succinctly and tell a satisfying story within a prescribed word length, but I was keen to keep to the underlying "truth" or "spirit" and power of the original myth, especially its symbolism of light and dark.

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

Well, these stories have lasted this long precisely because they continue to speak to us, and our concerns about the world, about

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.

humanity. They deal with universal concerns, and each new generation needs and wants to hear them. We pass on the stories we ourselves have heard and loved and the ones which have resonance for us.

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 studied Latin at school up to GCSE level . I didn't learn Greek. I read the Greek myths in translation. When I was commissioned to tell the myth of Persephone, I read other versions which had been written for children, such as *The Orchard Book of Greek Myths* retold by Geraldine McCaughrean. I did not look at Wikipedia.

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



Teresa Murfin (Illustrator)

Teresa Murfin is a Welsh picture-book illustrator from Wales.

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

Additional information

Summary

In this book, Persephone (or Sephy) narrates how she was kidnapped by Pluto and ended up in the underworld. After she was tricked by Pluto into eating six pomegranate seeds, she has to live half the year with Pluto and half with her mother. In the end, Sephy comes to terms with her condition, and says that she even has started to care for the lonely Pluto, yet she also anticipates her return to earth and she celebrates spring and the rejuvenation of life.

The book feature small illustrations in a childish style that imitates children's drawings.

Analysis

The abduction of Persephone is a harrowing myth. While it is partially meant to explain the yearly cycle of seasons, the blunt force and manipulation suffered by the once carefree maiden is staggering. Zeus' silent consent to the abduction of his daughter is therefore many times omitted from adaptations for children and true love is at times added between the two characters. This is the case, for example, in Kate McMullan's *Myth-O-Mania: Phone Home, Persephone!* (2002), which also employs the first-person narrator, but with Hades as the main protagonist.

The book is aimed at young children with developing reading and analytical skills. The story begins with Sephy's first person narration of the events. There is no explanation regarding Geek mythology and it appears as if the author presumes this knowledge exists. For example, Sephy says that her mother, Demeter, is the goddess of the Harvest, but there is not further information of the Greek pantheon. There is no indication to which religion Demeter belongs, as if the children should be familiar with the mythological setting. Furthermore, rather than Hades, the author chooses to use the name Pluto, which is less common in children's stories.

The first person narrative is not common in such retellings of myths and makes a refreshing twist. It is interesting to view Persephone's side of the story, since she is usually the passive character. Similar adaptations are occasionally brought from the narrator's viewpoint, or, rather more rarely, from that of Hades, as mentioned above.

One feature of the book may appear confusing to the young reader. On

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.

the one hand, Persephone (especially her nickname Sephy) appears to be a young girl. The illustrations also contribute to this assumption. However, a much older, bearded Pluto kidnaps her to be his bride. This age gap, while it correlates with the original story (although we do not know Persephone's specific age, only that she was a maiden, therefore we may assume she was considered to be in her teens) might cause an unsettling feeling.

After being brought to the underworld, Persephone is sad and lonely, missing her mother. Hermes is her only comfort and she treats him as her brother. Notably, however, she does not treat Hades as her uncle for this would have been too explicit for the young readership.

The connection between the myth and the renewal of life on earth is hinted, especially in the end when Sephy happily claims that "Life can begin again". While the story ends on a positive note, the young readers will probably feel sorry for poor Sephy, especially since she is characterized as close to their own age.

In the end Sephy is doomed to remain in the underworld for six months because she ate six seeds. This is a recurring feature in modern adaptations, although in the ancient texts it is noted that Persephone spent a third of the year with Hades, for example in Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 1. 29. In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* it the following is stated, "and all-seeing Zeus sent a messenger to them, rich-haired Rhea, to bring dark-cloaked Demeter to join the families of the gods: and he promised to give her what rights she should choose among the deathless gods and agreed that her daughter should go down for the third part of the circling year to darkness and gloom, but for the two parts should live with her mother and the other deathless gods. Thus he commanded." Translation taken from Perseus Project website, Hugh G. Evelyn-White, Ed., accessed: November 26, 20 October, 2019.

It is therefore unclear why did author chose to prolong Sephy's time in the underworld. Is it in order to create an equal dichotomy between life and death? Or is it simply an error? As Lisa Maurice notes, this is probably due to Hawthorne, *Tanglewood Tales* ("The Pomegranate Seeds") and their immense influence. The adapted version of Persephone's time on earth in the underworld became to dominate the narrative, eclipsing the original myth.

Either way, the contrast between life and death is duly emphasized in

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.

	our story.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Demeter Hermes Persephone Pluto / Plouton
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Conflict Emotions Parents (and children) Reconciliation

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.