Ayelet Peer, , "Entry on: Circe's Beastly Feast (Hopeless Heroes, 7) by Nick Roberts, Stella Tarakson ", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Susan Deacy. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1301. Entry version as of November 03, 2026.

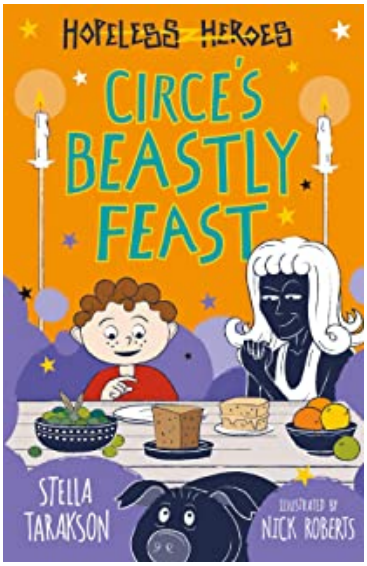
Nick Roberts , Stella Tarakson

# Circe's Beastly Feast (Hopeless Heroes, 7)

*United Kingdom (2020)*

TAGS: Apollo Circe Echo Hera Hercules Narcissus Odysseus / Ulysses Perseus






Courtesy of Sweet Cherry Publishing.

| General information | |
|---|---|
| *Title of the work* | Circe's Beastly Feast (Hopeless Heroes, 7) |
| *Country of the First Edition* | United Kingdom |
| *Country/countries of popularity* | United Kingdhom |
| *Original Language* | English |
| *First Edition Date* | 2020 |
| *First Edition Details* | Stella Tarakson, *Hopeless Heroes: Circe's Beastly Feast*. Sweet Cherry Publishing, Leicester, 2020, 208 pp. |
| *ISBN* | 9781782266419 |
| *Genre* | Fantasy fiction |
| *Target Audience* | Children (6–10 years) |
| *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<br>Susan Deacy, Roehampton University, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk |



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## Creators



### Nick Roberts (Illustrator)

Nick Roberts is an English illustrator. He likes cartoons, monsters, robots.

Source:

Official website (accessed: January 23, 2019)

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



### Stella Tarakson , b. 1968 (Author)

Stella Tarakson is an Australian author of Greek descent, who writes for children as well as adults; her work includes both fiction and non-fiction books. She began her career working at a law firm, but then decided to focus on writing. She won several awards for her books. In her blog, she writes that she has been interested in Greek mythology for a long time; she also writes: “Like many Greek Australians, I grew up on a steady diet of Greek mythology. Herakles and Theseus were as familiar to me as Cinderella and Snow White. That’s why I’m so excited to add my voice to the stories that have been told and retold over the millennia.”

Sources:



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Official website (accessed: January 23, 2019);

evelyneholingue.com (accessed: February 26, 2019).

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

**Questionnaire**

**1. What drew you to writing the *Hopeless Heroes stories*? How did you develop your particular literary style / idiom / aesthetic for your works inspired by Classical Antiquity? (These are overlapping questions, so feel free to answer them as one)**

Being the daughter of Greek migrants, I've grown up on a steady diet of Greek mythology. When I was very young, my father used to tell me many of the tales – I suppose he was continuing the great oral tradition of our ancestors! Books came next, and I'm lucky to still have most of them. My parents were very keen to pass their culture and identity on to their children, especially in a new country far from home. Now that my own children are growing, I also feel the need to "pass it on", keeping the link alive for future generations. I feel incredibly fortunate to be able to share these stories with a wider audience, and it's wonderful to have readers from all around the world enjoying my books! My literary style is not traditional, though. I've also grown up with a love of British comedy, which comes out quite strongly in the *Hopeless Heroes* series.

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

The myths continue to resonate with young audiences because we've never lost our fascination with monsters and heroes. Greek mythology is filled with passion and excitement, the characters are larger than life, and there are continuing parallels with our lives today. The human condition hasn't changed in thousands of years and I don't think it ever will.



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**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 don't have a classical education – I have degrees in Economics and Law from the University of Sydney – but I've always been interested in the classics. Once I started writing *Hopeless Heroes*, I decided I wanted to learn more. I've re-enrolled at USyd part-time and I've been studying ancient history and classical archaeology. It's wonderful to be able to study something purely out of interest! My main source is Barry Powell's *Classical Myth* published by Pearson. I also like the website theoi.com (accessed: March 19, 2019).

**4. Did you think about how aspects of Classical Antiquity (myth, history) would translate for young readers?**

As you know, many Greek myths are rather Adult Only. I had to think very carefully about how to be age-appropriate, while staying as true to the myths as possible. I avoided the bloodier tales, and edged carefully around sexual issues. For instance, Hera hates Hercules (yes, I had to use the more familiar Roman name) because she's jealous of his beautiful mother. Which is true. However, I didn't come right out and say why! Even so, children learn a lot about Greek history and mythology from the books. Many teachers in the UK have been reading them to their classes as part of the class studies. I'm actually teaching by stealth!

**5. How do you go about working with the comic / comedic aspects of classical antiquity?**

I've incorporated comedy by accentuating the flaws of the Greek heroes and by placing them in unexpected situations. For example, Hercules is super-strong but not exactly super-smart. In book 1, which is set in the modern day, he insists on using skills he developed while performing the Twelve Labours. Sadly they don't work so well when it comes to tackling housework and school bullies.



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**6. Are you planning any further forays into classical material?**

Yes, I'm definitely planning further forays! I've already had a few plays published in the *Australian Readers Theatre*, (Blake Education), that combine the classics with Australian history. I've written *The Flying Finish*, where Pegasus and Bellerophon enter the Melbourne Cup; *The Gold Rush Touch*, where a goldfields prospector succumbs to the Midas Touch; and *Pandora's Ballot Box*, where a young girl encounters the suffragette movement. They bring the classics to life in a new way, and show that they are still very relevant and relatable today!

**7. Anything else you think we should know?**

The *Hopeless Heroes* books aren't just retelling of the myths – that's been done many times before. The stories begin when 10-year-old Tim Baker accidentally breaks an ancient amphora, and discovers that Hercules had been trapped inside it for thousands of years. Once repaired, the vase allows Tim to travel back to Ancient Greece. He befriends Hercules' daughter Zoe (an addition to the traditional myths), and together they encounter famous heroes, escape bizarre monsters, solve baffling puzzles, and even defy the gods themselves. I only hope they don't hold grudges …

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## Additional information

Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs

Previous book: *Hopeless Heroes* (Series, Book 6): *Jason's Wild Winds*.

Next book: *Hopeless Heroes* (Series, Book 8): *Odysseus' Trojan Trick*.

Summary

This is book 7 in the "Hopeless Heroes" series. This is a series of portal-fantasy adventures in which a timid boy travels to the world of ancient myth by means of a magic vase, and learns to be brave through adventures with classical heroes. At the end of the previous book, Tim Baker went to ancient Greece perhaps for the final time (since his mother plans to sell the ancient vase) and to his horror, discovered that Hercules' family has no recollection of him at all. Furthermore, Hercules mentions Hera as his loving mother.

Worried and upset, Tim walks away from Zoe's house when he suddenly encounters Hermes. Tim does not trust Hermes, since the messenger god is Hera's servant, yet nonetheless he shares his story with him. Hermes suggests to him that Hercules might be angry since Zoe was hurt last time, and might be blaming Tim for it. He advises Tim to leave Zoe and her family for now and give them a chance to cool off. Meanwhile, He asks Tim to help him with his deliveries. Tim chooses a parcel which looks small and is aimed at Narcissus.

On his way, Tim meets the veteran soldier Odysseus, who is sitting on the side of the road. He starts telling Tim boastingly about his exploits, and Tim tries to avoid him. He finds the youth Narcissus looking at his own reflection in a pond, ignoring his surrounding. Then a mysterious girl runs to Tim, yet she can only repeat Tim's words. Narcissus explains that her name is Echo and that because of a curse, she can only repeat others' words. Tim believes that Echo wants him to open the parcel and does so. Inside he finds a box and inside the box there is a black flask, but when Tim holds it, he begins to be sucked into the flask, once again, it is Hera’s curse, which she had used before to trap Tim.

Tim recognizes the flask as the one made by the titan, Epimetheus; and knows that this flask has secret wax inside which Tim could warm and thereby escape, but he cannot find it and is trapped inside. He falls asleep and when he wakes up his flask is being carried by the old hero, Perseus. When Perseus arrives home, he meets his



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granddaughter, Zoe, who came to deliver him some fruit which Hera gave them. Perseus refuses; he tells her that the fruit is evil, for it is the fruit of the lotus, which causes loss of memory. This is why Hercules and Zoe did not remember Tim. Suddenly Hera arrives and tries to take the flask from Perseus but he refuses to give it to her and she leaves.

Later Zoe and Agatha manage to rescue Tim from the flask by heating it and causing the secret wax inside to melt so that Tim can escape. Yet Zoe still cannot remember him. Tim remembers that he left his magical vase near Narcissus, and he and Zoe hurry to the pond to retrieve it. Suddenly they meet a lion who signals to them to follow him; and they do so, following him to a large house, which Tim enters, while Zoe remains outside to watch. Inside the house he meets Circe, a beautiful young woman who invites him to eat. Upon eating, Tim turns into a pig and also meets Odysseus who also turned into a pig. Zoe then rescues them and, having regained her memory during this time, takes Tom's magical vase from Circe. At this point suddenly Hera arrives, but the group manages to scare her off. When Tim and Zoe return to her home, they overhear Hercules and Agatha, Zoe's mother, privately discussing something which might be related to Agatha's well-being, yet they refuse to disclose it to the children.

Analysis

In this adventure, Tim's worst fears come true: his friends forget about him and he is trapped by Hera. He is worried both for his own salvation as well as Zoe's and her family. This emphasizes how important they are to him, serving as his adoptive ancient family. In a way, Tim's experience also echoes Hera's greatest fears. Later Zoe asks him why Hera hates him so, "'Why is Hera so keen to trap you?' Zoe asked after they'd walked some distance. 'Athena said Hera's scared of the future and being forgotten, but still. It's not like you are a threat to her or anything.' 'Yeah, I've been wondering about that too.' Tim scratched his head with his free hand. 'Maybe she's worried that people in your day will start to realise she's not so important. I mean, nobody worships her in my day, and we're perfectly fine without her.'" (p. 97). See for example a similar reference to the gods in Mordicai Gerstein's *I am Pan*.

The issue of remembrance returns also with Odysseus. When he faces Hera in their last confrontation, she tells him, "'I am Queen of Olympus, and you are nobody. A mere mortal. Once your pathetic little



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life is over, you shall be forgotten - but I will be worshipped for all eternity!'" (p. 93). Yet Odysseus is not easily intimidated, "'Me? Forgotten? I do not think so,' Odysseus said. 'I have heard of a young bard who shall sing my praises to future generations. His name is Homer.'" (p. 93). Here the author inserts the name of the legendary poet as a person who might have lived together with these ancient heroes and deities. Interestingly, both are right. Both Hera and Odysseus would be remembered through the millennia, especially due to Homer. Yet Hera will no longer be worshiped hence her glory will diminish. Therefore she has a right to be afraid of the future, but not as much.

By telling Odysseus that he is nobody, the author might also be referring to Odysseus' famous conversation with the cyclops Polyphemus, in which he presented himself as nobody, outis. (I thank Lisa Maurice for this comment).

The episode involving Circe provides as a chance for Zoe to regain her memory and save her friend, as well as a comic relief, as Odysseus the pig mercilessly attacks Hera until her regains his human form by eating a special herb. The author refers to episodes form the Odyssey as part of Odysseus' boasting. Yet here he is a comic character who appears to be all talks and Tim doubts his competence (which will be revealed later in the series). This series focuses on Tm as a new kind of hero, and the real heroes of myths, Heracles, Perseus, Odysseus, Jason – they are older characters and are not the grand heroes they used to be, yet they maintain their kind heart.

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|---|---|
| Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts | Apollo Circe Echo Hera Hercules Narcissus Odysseus / Ulysses Perseus |
| Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture | Adventure Animals Family Friendship Heroism Magic Sacrifice |



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| Addenda | The review refers to the Kindle edition (9781782263517). |



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