Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: Odysseus' Trojan Trick (Hopeless Heroes, 8) 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/1302. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

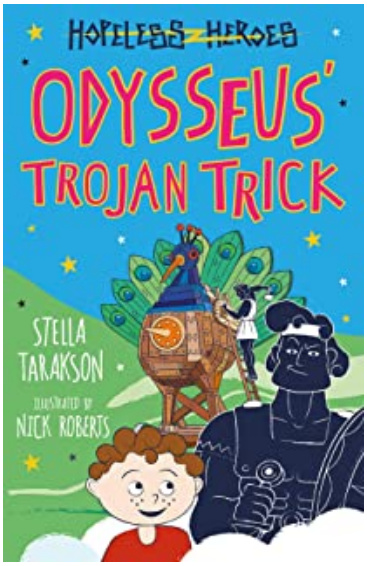
Nick Roberts , Stella Tarakson

Odysseus' Trojan Trick (Hopeless Heroes, 8)

United Kingdom (2020)

TAGS: Hephaestus Hera Hercules Hermes Jason Odysseus / Ulysses





Courtesy of Sweet Cherry Publishing.

General information	
Title of the work	Odysseus' Trojan Trick (Hopeless Heroes, 8)
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2020
First Edition Details	Stella Tarakson, *Hopeless Heroes: Odysseus' Trojan Trick*. Sweet Cherry Publishing, Leicester, 2020, 208 pp.
ISBN	9781782266426
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 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,
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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 …

Prepared by Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

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Additional information

Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs	Previous book: *Hopeless Heroes* (Series, Book 7): *Circe's Beastly Feast*. Next book: *Hopeless Heroes* (Series, Book 9): *Hades' Pet Hellhound*.

Summary

This is book 8 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 to try and say farewell to his friends, since his mother decided to sell the ancient vase, and found out that, due to one of Hera's machinations, they have no memories of him. After meeting the aging hero, Odysseus, and being trapped by Hera and Circe, Tim was saved by his good friend Zoe, the daughter of Heracles and Agatha. Yet when Zoe and him returned to her house, they caught the end of a conversation between Hercules and Agatha that might mean trouble for Zoe's mother. The parents did not agree to disclose their conversation and Tim went back to his home, worried.

Tim tries to focus on his chess-training with his best friend Ajay, but cannot seem to concentrate. Suddenly, Leo, the bully appears. He wows the boys with his chess skills and Ajay asks him to join the school club and participate in the coming competition. Leo agrees on the condition that later Tim must do something for him in return. Tim then hurries home and returns to ancient Greece; he is deeply concerned about his friends. When he arrives at Hercules' house, the hero tells him that Zoe and her mother went to the well. Hercules then invites Tim to the andron (part of the ancient Greek house which was reserved only for men) with him and Odysseus and Tim is highly honored by this invitation to join the men. Zoe then comes and tells them that Hera has seized Agatha since they refused to hand over Tim. The group then decides to go to Hera's fortress.

Following Odysseus' suggestion, the group invites Jason to build a wooden peacock as a distraction so that they can get into Hera's fortress. They manage to get inside, where they are confronted by Hera. She then burns the peacock. She tells them that Agatha is safe

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and Hera lets her and Zoe go while the men are kept in her fortress. Hera tells the men and Tim that she is going to fetch the gorgon Euryale. She tells Hermes to keep an eye on things, and that if the prisoners attack, he should bring her son. When she leaves, a battle breaks out between her hoplites and the heroes. Tim thinks that he sees an armed man in full armour watching the fight from above; he believes it is Hera's son, Hephaestus. Jason then begins to throw dragon teeth which belonged to the Colchian dragon. He thinks they are a good luck charm yet when they hit the ground, soldiers spring out.

In a moment of repose during the fighting, Tim suggests to Hercules that they should take this opportunity to go and check on his family. Hercules is reluctant to leave his friends in battle but is then persuaded by Tim. When they arrive, they see that Agatha and Zoe became statues. Tim hurries to his home to fetch the miraculous golden glove, but while doing so, he hears a pounding at the door; apparently Leo has stopped by. Tim has no time to waste and he ignores Leo and returns to Hercules. With the gloves they manage to unfreeze the ladies. They tell them that it was a man who turned them to stone. Then they decide to tell Hera that Tim cannot return anymore since his mother sold the vase, so that she will leave them alone. Tim agrees and with a heavy heart returns home.

However, Leo is waiting for Tim to return and enters the house, looking for the vase. While the boys battle for the vase, it magically transports them both to ancient Greece, ending the book with yet another cliff-hanger.

Analysis

In this book, Tim finally completes his transition into a hero. He proves that the safety of his friends is more important to him than his own and he is willing to do whatever he can to protect them. The first sign that Tim can now equally stand with the mythological heroes, is when he is invited to Hercules' andron and the hero himself acknowledges Tim’s abilities. "'The andron? B-but ... only men are allowed in there,' he stuttered...'That is true.' Hercules stared down at Tim, his face thoughtful. 'But you have changed a great deal since we first met. You have faced many monsters and outsmarted the gods themselves. My friend, I think you have earned your place inside.'" (p. 13). Tim then accompanies Hercules and Odysseus; while he is not equal to these great heroes of ancient times, yet his own heroism is a

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mix of his modern knowledge and the things he has learnt in the past.

When the confrontation with Hera approaches, Tim feels scared to face her yet also ashamed to appear like a coward. While Hercules understands his fears, it is Odysseus who encourages Tim's valour and tells Hercules, "give him this opportunity to prove himself a man, and worthy of entering your andron. Allow him to fight at our side and gain glory in battle." (p. 25). He later announces that the heroes are more than a match for Hera's army. Being a hero is most important to him. Odysseus remains true to the Homeric values of glory in battle, while Hercules, as a father himself, appears more concerned for Tim's well-being and safety. In this event, Hercules is not just a heroic character, but more importantly, he is a parent. Hercules is given a chance to prove his merits as a father and not just as a warrior, a chance he was deprived of in the ancient myth.

Hercules' vulnerability is exposed when his family is at risk. In contrast with the classical myth in which he is the who hurt his family, here he is offered some kind of redemption; a chance to save his family form Hera and not kill them because of her. He can be magnificent in his attempt to protect them (as Tim thinks) but can be easily discouraged. When Hera threatens to bring Hephaestus, he is worried that innocent lives might get hurt because of them and sees that as a personal failure, "I have failed you, my friend. I have failed everybody." (p. 52).

It is not only the men who are heroic, however; Zoe and especially Agatha, also fight Hera. Agatha stands up to the goddess, unmoved by her threats. Although Hera later tells the group that as the goddess of women and marriage she cannot hurt Agatha, her words do not seem genuine in light of her past actions.

When the battle ensues, Tim sees how all of these seemingly silly men, Hercules, Odysseus and Jason, suddenly transform. "Tim's voice faltered as he looked back at his friends. He hardly recognised them. Odysseus' face had stiffened, his eyes narrowing as he drew his sword. Jason, too, looked different. Older. Harder." (p. 61). The author here gives these characters, who are often illustrated comically, their past glory and heroic splendour. Their determination moves Tim, who wants to fight as well, despite the fact that he is a skinny ten-year-old. The spirit of the heroes enters him as well. However, Tim also remains true to his modern family values. When there is an opportunity, he asks Hercules to leave the fight and go home to check on his family. At

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	first Hercules is torn since it is dishonorable to leave the fight, but then Tim intervenes: "'What's more important?' Tim shouted over the raging battle. 'Your honour or your family and friends?'" (p. 66). Hercules then chooses his family. The hero later returns to the fight, since he cannot bare the sadness of watching Tim leave for his home for the last time. The muscular hero is truly sensitive and emotional. He then gives Tim the final approval of his heroism, "'I cannot say goodbye to you, Tim Baker. Instead I will...' Tim stared, stunned, as the great hero Hercules stood to attention and saluted him." (p. 85). Our modern hero is someone who protects his loved one, who cares for his family and friends and is not eager to fight. Tim is overjoyed by Hercules' gesture and his acknowledgement of him as a warrior and a hero. He earned his place in the andron. This could be a befitting end to the story, yet Tim's adventures are not yet over.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Hephaestus Hera Hercules Hermes Jason Odysseus / Ulysses
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Family Friendship Heroism Sacrifice
Addenda	The review refers to the Kindle edition (9781782263524).

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