Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: Hades' Pet Hellhound (Hopeless Heroes, 9) 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/1303. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

Nick Roberts , Stella Tarakson

Hades' Pet Hellhound (Hopeless Heroes, 9)

United Kingdom (2019)

TAGS: Ares Cerberus Charon Eurydice Hades Hephaestus Hera Heracles Hermes Hippocrates Orpheus Pegasus Phoenix (Bird)





Courtesy of Sweet Cherry Publishing.

General information	
Title of the work	Hades' Pet Hellhound (Hopeless Heroes, 9)
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2019
First Edition Details	Stella Tarakson, *Hopeless Heroes: Hades' Pet Hellhound*. Sweet Cherry Publishing, Leicester, 2019, 208 pp.
ISBN	9781782263531
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

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



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 …

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 8): *Odysseus' Trojan Trick*.

Next book: *Hopeless Heroes* (Series, Book 10): *Time's Up Tim!*.

Summary

This is book 9 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 was caught in a fight over the magical vase with his class bully, Leo. The two were then transported to ancient Greece. While each tried to control the vase (Leo wanting to proceed, Tim wishing to return home), they began falling and were saved by Hermes. Tim (reluctantly) takes Leo to Zoe's house. Zoe and her family warmly welcome Leo as Tim's friend, and Tim begins to wonder whether Leo may be trying to steal his friends from him by treating them nicely.

Hippocrates then arrives and asks the children to help him collect a special herb for his patient. Leo promises to protect Zoe and reassures Agatha. While the children start to collect the herbs, they are attacked by special birds, Phoenixes. After managing to fend off the birds' attacks, suddenly Hera's peacocks arrive. Hera threatens them again and, since Leo does not let her bird eat his jellybeans, she makes him disappear and sends him to the underworld.

Tim feels responsible, since he did not tell Leo about Hera in advance and he decides to rescue him, while Zoe joins him as well. They call Hermes who agrees to take them up to the river Styx. Meanwhile it is revealed that the strange warrior with a plum of fire on his black helmet who appeared in the previous volume, while Tim and the heroes were fighting Hera's soldiers, was not Hephaestus, as Tim thought, but Hera's other son, Ares. Hermes tells them that he freed Ares from his jail in Tartarus by mistake. Chiron then takes the children further and tells them a bit about Ares, the god of war, who enjoys killing.

Upon embarking, Zoe and Tim are faced with the giant dog Cerberus. While they consider how to pass him, Orpheus suddenly arrives and

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with his lyre puts the dog to sleep. He tells them that he came to rescue his wife Eurydice yet failed to do so, so he chose to remain in the underworld. With his help the children go on and find Leo bound in one of the caves. The trio then come to Hades' throne room and ask him to release Leo from the underworld. Hades agrees in the condition that they do not look back. Then they arrive safely outside, once again to the shore of the Styx. Leo manages to divert Cerberus, who chased after them, by throwing Orpheus' lyre into the tunnel from which he came and then shutting the door. Orpheus, who joins them, advises them to ask Pegasus for a ride back home but warns them that Pegasus only allows great heroes to mount him. Pegasus arrives and using Leo's sweets, Tim gains his trust and he takes them back.

When they near Zoe's house, they hear that Hera is inside, telling Agatha and Hercules that Zoe fell down a well. Zoe then bursts into the room to reassure her parents. To stop Hera from bothering his friends, Tim decides on a new plan. He remembers that Leo suggested that his magic vase might grant wishes, so he decides to try. He wishes for Hera to shrink and then locks her inside the vase (as she had initially done to Hercules). Agatha gives Tim a replica vase that his mother can sell and Tim and Leo return home. Tim then hides the magical vase so his mother does not find it and he makes it vanish from sight at will. The story ends with Tim watching TV and watching in horror as he sees that various official buildings in London have turned into Greek temples. He rushes to the vase and discovers that Hera escaped.

Analysis

In this book, Tim must face his worst enemies: Leo from the modern world and Hera from the past. By using his wits and his compassion, he manages to overcome this challenge.

When Tim is flying with Leo to ancient Greece, he reflects on how much he has changed, thanks to Hercules' encouragement. "It was Hercules' encouragement that had finally helped Tim to stand up to Leo – something Tim would always be grateful for. Gone were the days when Tim felt awkward and uncertain. In Ancient Greece especially, he was a better, stronger person." (p. 5).

His adventures in ancient Greece strengthen Tim and help him grow as a person and feel more confident. He could not attain this confidence in the real world; he had to go through his own odyssey

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first, alone, and in a strange place, and with the help of Hercules and his family he finally became stronger. Perhaps Tim could not go through this process at home, since his mother was not around, and his friend, Ajay, could not help him against Leo. Furthermore, it appears that Hercules is the comforting father-figure whom Tim lacked and needed. It does not mean that his mother was not enough; on the contrary, throughout the book Tim understands that the love his mother gave him is what made him kind and secure. Nevertheless, Hercules helped him become more manly and strong. This second ancient family is therefore precious to Tim and this is why he is afraid to lose them to Leo. This adventure also helps Leo to grow and change his conduct towards Tim. He can now appreciate him as a friend and understand him as well.

The decisive moment for Tim appears when he decides to rescue Leo, in spite of the grave danger of traveling to the underworld. Unlike Orpheus, Tim and Zoe succeed in their mission. This shows how mature, Tim has become; he does not let old enmity dictate his actions towards Leo. This also makes Leo grateful to him and the two can become closer. "'No,' Zoe said firmly, 'it's his fault. Why should you risk your life for him?' Tim didn't know how to answer. All he knew was that it wasn't right. He wouldn't wish Hera's wrath on anyone, not even his worst enemy." (p. 39). Exhibiting these qualities makes Tim worthy of Pegasus. While he doubts himself and does not think he is such a great hero, the horse does not come to him just for the sweets. Tim realizes that "all the horse wanted was kindness and sugar. A bit like Leo, perhaps." (p. 85). the myth of Orpheus and Euridice is used in contrast with Tim. Tim succeeds where the mythological hero failed; Tim is a new hero for a new age.

Regarding the underworld, it is described as a barren land with multiple caves, beautiful yet horrible with a fetid smell. While it is a bit eerie, it is not as frightening as in other books (for example, Lucy Coats' "Beasts of Olympus" series. Hades is tired of his position and is a bit gloomy, but there are no frightening scenes of ghosts. Even Charon is not described with his usual skeletal figure, but as a round-cheeked, merry man. The author thus offers a brighter view of the underworld, suitable for the young readers. The underworld is scary enough and Tim and Zoe are brave to enter it even without emphasizing is horror. The focus is on the relationship between the children and not on the underworld. Hence the myth of Orpheus and Euridice for example or even the character of Pegasus are adapted to support Tim's adventure.

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	In the end, this story strengthens Tim's position as a great hero (as Hercules compliments him) who finally stood up to Hera and also showed his morality by rescuing Leo.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Ares Cerberus Charon Eurydice Hades Hephaestus Hera Heracles Hermes Hippocrates Orpheus Pegasus Phoenix (Bird)
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Family Friendship Heroism Magic Sacrifice
Addenda	The review refers to the Kindle edition (9781782263531).

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