Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: Hercules and the Nine-Headed Hydra (Heroes in Training, 16) by Craig Phillips, Tracey West", 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/1373. Entry version as of October 07, 2026.

Craig Phillips , Tracey West

Hercules and the Nine-Headed Hydra (Heroes in Training, 16)

United States (2019)

TAGS: Aphrodite Apollo Chronos Hera Hercules Hermes Hydra Oracles Poseidon Zeus

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

General information	
Title of the work	Hercules and the Nine-Headed Hydra (Heroes in Training, 16)
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	USA and worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2019
First Edition Details	Tracey West, *Heroes in training: Hercules and the Nine-Headed Hydra*. Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division: Aladdin Press, New York, 2019, 112 pp.
ISBN	9781534432918
Genre	Action and adventure fiction, Illustrated works, Mythological fiction
Target Audience	Children (6–10 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 Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk

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Creators

Craig Phillips (Illustrator)

Phillips is an Australian award winning illustrator who works with various publishers, including Random House, Simon & Schuster, Penguin, Scholastic, Bloomsbury, Egmont, Hardie Grant, and many more. As a child he was inspired by mythology and cartoons, and fantasy novels such as the *Hobbit* and *Conan the Barbarian*. He is still fascinated by the cartoons, comics, novels and stories that he enjoyed as a child and tries to capture that feeling in his work. His comics have been serialised in children's literary magazines and were collected and published as *Giants, Trolls, Witches, Beasts: Ten Tales from the Deep, Dark Woods* in 2017 by Allen and Unwin. He lives in New Zealand.

Source:

Official website (accessed: October 12, 2018).

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

Tracey West , b. 1965 (Author)

West is an American children's author. She has written about 200 books for children. She studied English and Journalism at Rutgers University, and now writes fiction and non-fiction books. Among her publications are *Dragon Masters*, *Cupcake Diaries*, *Pokémon* and more. West continues the *Heroes in Training* series which was created

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by Joan Holub and Suzanne Williams. (see under *Zeus and the Thunderbolt of Doom*)

Source:

Official website (accessed: August 16, 2019).

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

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Additional information

Summary

This is the sixteenth book in the *Heroes in Training* series. In this installment, after vanquishing Cronus and his army of Titans and Cronies, Zeus and his fellow Olympians begin to rule Greece.

Zeus discovers that being the ruler is not as glamorous as he thought. He mostly sits in his palace (together with Hera, Athena and Hermes), listening to the villagers' complaints and judging local disputes. He misses the adventures he used to have in the past and complains that he has the most boring job in comparison with his friends: "Poseidon is ruling the seas, and Hades is ruling the Underworld. Apollo and Dionysus are hanging out in the temple at Delphi, jamming together and holding contests. Demeter and Hestia are traveling all around Greece, helping people. Artemis gets to live in the forest, and Aphrodite gets to live at the beach. Even Hephaestus and Ares are having fun building machines in a cool new volcano." (p. 9).

One day, Zeus hears from the villagers that the common talk in Greece is that a boy named Hercules helped the Olympians defeat the Titans. Zeus, Hermes and Hera are puzzled since they are not familiar with this boy.

One day Hercules himself appears in the palace. He claims that he is half-god (although he does not know his divine father) and has super strength; he appears very haughty and brags about his power. Hercules tells Zeus that his mother sent him to visit his distant relative king Eurystheus and that he accidently threw eggs all over his palace. Apparently these were eggs of Stymphalian birds and they destroyed the palace. Now the angry king wants revenge and even gathers his troops and arrives to storm Olympus.

To pacify the angry king, Apollo arrives and tries to help. Then Hera suggests that Hercules performs some tasks to make up for the trouble that he caused the king. Apollo suggests that the oracle decides the tasks so they all go to Delphi, where the Pythia asks Apollo to prophesy the tasks. He begins to sing of three tasks, the first of which is to bring a scale from the Hydra's tail. Zeus then decides to accompany Hercules on his task, since he does not wish to judge the villagers and needs a break from their complaints. During their journey, Zeus confronts Hercules with being a liar and also a thief. Hercules steals a coin from a griffin and even Aphrodite's golden

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apple. Before locating the Hydra, Zeus and Hercules fight a giant crab when Poseidon emerges to help them.

Poseidon discloses the whereabouts of the Hydra, whom he had relocated the Hydra since she used to scare sailors. He asks them not to hurt her since he promised her that no one would bother her. However, due to Hercules' recklessness, the two start a fight with the Hydra during which Hercules cut off one of her heads and another two emerge. Zeus is forced to use his bolt to save them both so they can escape. Hercules manages to take a scale but Poseidon is angry with them for hurting the beast. Poseidon blames Zeus since he is an Olympian and should have acted more Conscientiously. Zeus feels that his siblings are angry with him because of Hercules' rude behaviour and is saddened, but Hercules apologizes and the two return to the oracle to discover that their next mission is to bring a belt from a warrior queen. Zeus joins Hercules once more and the book ends.

Analysis

Zeus realizes that being an all-mighty ruler involves a lot of dull work and bureaucracy. In a nod to his role as the god of justice, Zeus must sit and judge in all kinds of trials which he finds boring. Hera quickly reminds him that he can choose to step down any time. Hera does not seem to truly trust Zeus and constantly reminds him that she can be better than him. Hence the series continues the presentation of Hera as a nagging and unkind person, (similarly to her ancient presentation in the *Iliad*). Yet Zeus in the story has a good nature and is caring. In this story Hera's resentment of him appears as jealousy of his powers and success, as opposed to the ancient myths, where it is caused by Zeus' infidelity. Although Hera is usually presented as malicious and irrational in her behaviour. Yet on the other hand, Hera's constant bickering in the story makes Zeus works harder to show his worth to her and the others.

The myths referred to in this story are the Titanomachy which involved the assistance of Hercules (for example in Pindar's Nemean Ode 1.55) and also the labours of Hercules including his fight with a giant crab, Carcinus during the labour of the Hydra. Due to the young audience and the lighter tone of this series, as an adventure tale aimed at young adolescents, the reason for Hercules to perform three tasks is rather trivial (throwing eggs at the palace) and the tragic element is removed.

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Hercules is not portrayed as a hero in our story, similarly to Beasts of Olympus, although he is presented as more of a rascal than a true villain. In appearance, his muscular body and wavy blond hair are perhaps intended to indicate his good looks (Aphrodite is blond in this series as well), as well as recalling the 1997 Disney movie in which Hercules had brown-golden wavy hair.

While in the ancient myth of Heracles, Hera is the one who is jealous of Hercules, in this story Zeus seems the one more intrigued by him and is also offended by Hercules' lies. Zeus is envious of Hercules' future adventures which reminds him of his own previous adventures before his ascent to power. While they are not a family in this story and the identity of Hercules' father remains unknown (Zeus even doubts that Hercules is truly a half-god as he boasts), the two of them get along well, while Zeus tries to educate and mend Hercules' ways, similar to how an older sibling cares for his younger one. In the end, Zeus thinks, "Hercules was a liar, a braggart, a thief, and an annoying traveling companion. Even so, Zeus didn't want anything bad to happen to the boy." (p. 94). This shows Zeus' maturity and empathy even to those who act badly. He tries to see the good in people and help them change their ways, even though Hercules remains bothersome. However, Hercules does admit to being scared of the Hydra and trying to hide it from Zeus. In a way, Hercules may remind Zeus of his former self, when he just began his journey and was scared and unsure. Just as Zeus' siblings were there to help him when he needed so he is there for Hercules, even if the boy does not appreciate it yet. We feel that there is a strong connection between these two characters, they are like a family, Hercules being Zeus' junior, even though they are not related in our story.

In keeping with these reversals of traditional myth, the Hydra, as in Lucy Coats' *Beasts of Olympus: Beast Keeper*, is also not a fearsome monster; although she did scare sailors she never hurt anyone. Poseidon also vouches for her safety and is disappointed in Zeus when the Hydra is hurt and blames him for acting rashly.

To conclude, in this story Zeus needs to learn the duties of a king and that ruling is not an exciting role all the time. Yet he grows as a person by accompanying Hercules and learning that adventures are important but should not hurt others. Thus he learns more about his responsibilities as a ruler. The young readers learn how one can work together in a team, trusting each other and not be afraid to show others what they truly feel.

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Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aphrodite Apollo Chronos Hera Hercules Hermes Hydra Oracles Poseidon Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adolescence Adventure Adversity Appearances Authority Character traits Conflict Emotions Family Friendship Gaining understanding Heroism Identity Individuality Journeys Judgement Learning Magic Maturity
Addenda	The review refers to the Kindle edition. (9781534432932)

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