Michelle Wyatt, "Entry on: High-Five to the Hero by Julia Bereciartu, Vita Murrow", peer-reviewed by Elizabeth Hale and Susan Deacy. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2022). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1397. Entry version as of September 14, 2026.

Julia Bereciartu , Vita Murrow

High-Five to the Hero

United Kingdom (2019)

TAGS: Cerberus Hera Heracles Hercules Hydra Midas Twelve Labours of Heracles

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

General information	
Title of the work	High-Five to the Hero
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	Australia, Korea, New Zealand, UK, USA
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2019
First Edition Details	Vita Murrow and Julia Bereciartu, *High-Five to the Hero*. London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, 2019, 95 pp.
ISBN	9781786037817
Genre	Didactic fiction, Short stories
Target Audience	Children (recommended for readers age 6–9)
Author of the Entry	Michelle Wyatt, University of New England, michellewyatt5@gmail.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au 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

Julia Bereciartu , b. 1980
(Illustrator)

Born in San Sebastian, Spain, Julia Bereciartu has been drawing and painting since she was a child. She completed her undergraduate degree in Audiovisual Communications at the University of Navarra in Pamplona, Spain before completing a Masters of Digital Animation at the Autonomous University of Barcelona. She then worked for several years in graphic design before pursuing her childhood ambitions, and, since 2009, she has been happily working as a freelance illustrator from her own home studio in Madrid. Bereciartu's client list includes Google and many high-profile publishers, magazines and children's toy and media producers. She is a compulsive knitter and lives with her cat.

Sources:

Official website (accessed: January 13, 2022);

LinkedIn (accessed: January 13, 2022).

Bio prepared by Michelle Wyatt, University of New England, michellewyatt5@gmail.com

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Vita Murrow (Author)

Vita Murrow was born in central India, but she grew up in Minneapolis in the United States of America. She completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts, in Photography and Video, from the Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle, and she received her Masters of Science in Education from the Bank Street College of Education in New York. Murrow was once an American Sign Language Interpreter, and she interned in children's media in the film department of the Sesame Workshop. She has also worked as an elementary educator in both Seattle and New York, and she spent almost five years as director for the Greater Boston Jewish Coalition for Literacy. Alongside her husband Ethan, she is the co-creator of Two Murrows Productions where she works as an executive producer and freelance writer and illustrator. The company is based in Boston where Murrow lives with her husband and their two children.

Sources:

LinkedIn (accessed: January 13, 2022);

Profile at the Amazon (accessed: January, 2022).

Bio prepared by Michelle Wyatt, University of New England, email: michellewyatt5@gmail.com

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Additional information

Translation	Korean

Summary

High-Five to the Hero was written after the success of Murrow's first published collection of subverted fairy tales, *Power to the Princess*, in which she addresses gendered stereotypes of femininity for young girls. Likewise, this book is collection of retold myths, fairy tales and folklore that subvert traditional representations of gender and sex, but here she disrupts traditional representations of masculinity. Murrow writes well known male literary characters, traditional champions of conquest and sovereignty, into heroes of sensitivity, kindness and community spirit.

Alongside retellings of the classical myths of *Hercules* and *King Midas*, the story of *King Arthur* is shared as a lesson on diplomatic mediation between groups with different interests. *Tom Thumb* serves as a lesson against making assumptions based on appearances, and Sinbad becomes a thoughtful and kindly elder mentor to a young and nervous aspiring sailor. The *Emperor's New Clothes* advocates for staying true to oneself when faced with adversity, and *Rumpelstiltskin* also promotes the importance of just being yourself. *Pinocchio*, learning from failure, teaches the reader what it means to have the heart of a true boy, and *Jack and the Beanstalk* is rewritten as the tale of an overambitious son wanting to be the sole provider for his two mothers who are just trying to teach him good trade practices. *Quasimodo*, a young boy living alone with a physical disability, overcomes his shyness to defend his historic town from property developers, and *The Snow Man*, once lonely, falls in love with the snow man next door. *Prince Charming* is a teenager sick of being typecast and limited by external expectations, and *The Pied Piper* teaches his community to appreciate the work that goes into staying at home to raise children. *The Elves and the Shoemaker* demonstrate the value in paying it forward to one's own community, and the retelling of *Anansi* teaches the reader the value in appreciating different perspectives.

Analysis

Murrow reworks the myth of Hercules to emphasise the generous

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emotion for which the Greek hero was renowned and to minimise the importance of his physical prowess. To begin, the infant Hercules tames, rather than kills, the snakes sent to his crib by Hera. While Hera's influence over Hercules features strongly in this retelling, she is framed as stepmother just looking to identify with her stepson rather than the jealous and vengeful goddess that relentlessly punishes the child of Zeus and his lover Alcmena. Here, the labours set by Eurystheus are instead given by Hera to distract her protégé from his interests in the healing arts. Hercules wants to heal rather than hurt others, but Hera wants her star warrior ready to fight. Neither the Nemean Lion nor the Hydra die by Hercules' hand in this retelling. Instead, the lion trims his own mane for Hercules after he beats him in a wrestling match, and the poison blood of the Hydra is given as a miracle elixir that later saves the life of Hera when she is injured finishing Hercules' labours. These other labours are mentioned but not elaborated on, and Hera takes them on in frustration when Hercules tells her that he no longer wants to fight. Hercules becomes the nurse that races to recover Hera from underneath the three headed dog that can be recognised as Cerberus, and the story becomes a lesson on masculine strength being used in service of others. Hera replaces a brawny statue of Hercules with one of the staff of Asclepius, and he then comes to wear this image on his nurse's uniform.

In Murrow's retelling of King Midas, the protagonist is framed as a kindly and giving king who was only ever troubled by what he could not do for his subjects. It had become increasingly difficult for him to solve the kingdom's woes with money, and he was distressed by his people's suffering. There is no mention of Dionysus, Bacchus or Silenus, the wine loving characters often appearing in this classical myth, but instead Zeus is somewhat alluded to. Indeed, Midas comes to feel he is failing his people, so an envoy of the sky, appearing as a lightning bolt, grants his wish that all in his kingdom will become golden. The envoy also warns him to watch what he wishes for, and, as with the classical myth, Midas' touch turns all to gold. However, in this version, nobody becomes the form of solid gold metal, but instead the golden touch leaves them with a flattened affectation of experience. Life, like the golden fruit Midas eats, becomes bland and tasteless. He soon realises that his golden touch has made everything appear okay, but really it has just prevented those in his kingdom from expressing their true feelings. He comes to understand that his value as king lies in the empathy he can afford others. When he stops trying

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	to control his kingdom's suffering, and instead shares in it with an open heart, the golden curse is lifted. While the text is explicitly didactic, with little left to nuance, the cartoon-like illustrations do add further layers of meaning to some of the stories. Issues of racial inequality are not explicitly mentioned in the text, but they are implied by the visual representations of the characters and the challenges they come to encounter. For instance, through the illustrations, the reader comes to see that Tom Thumb's parents are a biracial couple, and that he, a small black boy, is being opportunistically exploited by some rather larger white men. Indeed, through these retellings, the text functions to disrupt hegemonic portrayals of masculinity that often serve to dominate and exclude representations of diverse races, sexualities, ages and abilities and to instead promote male heroes of the heart.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Cerberus Hera Heracles Hercules Hydra Midas Twelve Labours of Heracles
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adversity Appearances Boys Disability Diversity Emotions Expectations Fairy tale references Family Friendship Gender expectations/construction Gender, male Good deeds Heroism Identity Individuality Intertextuality LGBTQI Peers Race Relationships Socialisation Values
Further Reading	Bacchilega, Cristina, *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997. Parille, Ken, *Boys at Home: Discipline, Masculinity, and the Boy-Problem in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, University of Tennessee Press, 2009. Sunderland, Jane, *Language, Gender and Children's Fiction*, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2012. Voelker-Morris, Robert, and Julie Voelker-Morris, "Stuck in Tights:

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