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Stephen Cartwright , Claudia Zeff

# The Amazing Adventures of Hercules

*United Kingdom (1982)*

TAGS: Apples of the Hesperides Architecture Artemis Athena Atlas Centaur(s) Cerberus Charon Crete Diana Gods Hades Hera Heracles Hercules Hermes Hydra Juno Katabasis Laurel Wreath Minerva Minos Persephone Proserpina Twelve Labours of Heracles Underworld Zeus




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

| General information | |
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| *Title of the work* | The Amazing Adventures of Hercules |
| *Country of the First Edition* | United Kingdom |
| *Country/countries of popularity* | United Kingdom |
| *Original Language* | English |
| *First Edition Date* | 1982 |
| *First Edition Details* | Claudia Zeff, *The Amazing Adventures of Hercules*. Usborne Young Reading Series 2. London: Usborne Publishing Ltd., 1982, 48 pp. |
| *ISBN* | 9780746085592 |
| *Genre* | Illustrated works, Instructional and educational works, Myths |
| *Target Audience* | Children (4+) |
| *Author of the Entry* | Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk |
| *Peer-reviewer of the Entry* | Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk<br>Hanna Paulouskaya, University of Warsaw, hannapa@al.uw.edu.pl |



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## Creators



### Stephen Cartwright (Illustrator)



### Claudia Zeff (Author)

Children's author, Claudia Zeff, has written a number of works for young children, most notably for Usborne Publishing. She has contributed myth-based stories to the Young Readers series, including *Jason and the Golden Fleece* (Usborne Young Reading – Series Two, 1982). She has also published works for pre-readers, including several in the Usborne Find It Board Books series, such as: *Find the Puppy*, *Find the Kitten*, *Find the Teddy*.

Bio prepared by Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk



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## Additional information

**Adaptations**

This work features within: *The Usborne Book of Legends: Hercules, Jason, Ulysses* (Usborne, 1983).

**Summary**

This illustrated storybook is written with deliberately simple language for those learning to read. It belongs to a series that contains many examples of traditional myths and simplified versions of classic literature. The books tells the story of Hercules' youth and the famous Twelve Labours, divided into chapters as follows:

- Chapter 1. *The Jealous Goddess*.
- Chapter 2. *The Tasks Begin*.
- Chapter 3. *A Stag and a Boar*.
- Chapter 4. *Rivers and Birds*.
- Chapter 5. *Bulls and Horses*.
- Chapter 6. *Amazons and Ogres*.
- Chapter 7. *Two Tasks To Go*.

**Analysis**

Chapter 1. *The Jealous Goddess*. This chapter provides a brief overview of the myths of Hercules' youth. It is explained that the god Zeus had a child with a human, and that all the gods love the child except for Hera. Hera's jealousy is not explained; as she is not explicitly said to be Zeus' wife, there is no implication of Zeus' infidelity, never mind an explicit reference to it. Baby Hercules is then depicted strangling the snakes sent by Hera. Hercules then helps the king of Thebes, who gives Hercules his daughter Megara to marry (her consent is indicated via a thought-bubble). Hera puts a spell on Hercules that makes him kill "his beloved sons"; the reader's interpretation of this act is guided by the narrator's explicit, "Then he felt terrible", and a picture of Hercules overcome by remorse. The tasks are set to lead to forgiveness

Chapter 2. *The Tasks Begin*. In this chapter, Hercules faces the Nemean Lion and the Hydra. Hercules takes his unnamed nephew with him "for company" on the Hydra mission. Iolaus is left unnamed and depicted as a child, in contrast to ancient depictions which typically represent him as a youth or adult. This may be intended to



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present the young Iolaus as a "Mary Sue" figure, a figure in contact with the protagonist(s) that the readers or viewers can more readily identify with. Having Iolaus as a child nephew also removes the suggestion of a romantic relationship between them that is present in some ancient traditions and which may have been considered unsuitable for a young readership.

Chapter 3. *A Stag and a Boar*. This chapter recounts the hunting of the stag with golden antlers, and the capture of the Erymanthian boar. The later includes the tradition found in Apollodorus, *(Library,* 2. 83), in which Hercules visits a friendly centaur before going after the boar. It avoids the section of that myth in which the pair are attacked, Hercules kills a number of centaurs, and Hercules' friend is killed. This keeps the focus of the story and of the violence on the monsters being hunted, rather than making it part of the social background. Apollodorus also relates that Hercules caught the boar by leading it into deep snow; that tradition is reflected in this book's illustration of the labour, which features a humorously angry boar floundering in a snowdrift.

Chapter 4. *Rivers and Birds*. This chapter retells the myths of the Augean stables and the Stymphalian birds.

Chapter 5. *Bulls and Horses*. Hercules faces the Cretan bull, which "snorted fire from its nostrils"; and he takes Diomedes' horses. The text is explicit that "Hercules himself killed Diomedes and gave him to the horses" who "gobbled [him] up."

Chapter 6. *Amazons and Ogres*. In this chapter Hercules gains Hippolyta's belt. There is no reference to the death of Hippolyta, but the fight between the groups is depicted at length; "the fierce women were defeated, but many men were hurt." In the remainder of the chapter, Helios helps Hercules by sending a water-lily to use as a boat, Hercules attacks a two-headed dog, and he kills Geryon and takes his cattle.

Chapter 7. *Two Tasks To Go*. The final tasks take place in this chapter. Hercules takes the apples of Hesperides, tricking Atlas in the process. He then captures Cerberus, who is depicted with a snake for a tail and Medusa-like snake hair growing out of each of his three heads.

The story concludes with Hercules forgiven for killing his sons. Through a speech-bubble, Zeus says "Well done, my son!". The other



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gods are also proud of Hercules, welcome him to Olympus, and keep him safe on his further adventures.

A note above the copyright details informs the reader that Hercules' story is 3000 years old and from ancient Greece, and that Hercules is the Roman form of his Greek name. Child readers are unlikely to read this note as it falls beyond adverts for further books in the series and appears in smaller text. Nonetheless, the presence of this note communicates the enduring legacy of this set of myths, and thus the cultural initiation that the child reader experiences in reading the book.

The clothing, armaments, and architecture depicted place the action in antiquity. Some of the illustrations evoke aspects of Greek iconography, notably images of Eurystheus hiding in a large pot, as he does in many Greek vase scenes. There appears to be a colour-scheme guiding the reader's response to the gods: a wicked Hera and the king and queen of "the land of the dead" are black-haired (as is Zeus), while the friendlier Athene, Artemis, and Hermes are blonde or ultra-blonde. Charon is depicted as a white man wearing a long, dark hooded robe. While this reinforces a traditional dichotomy between dark bad – blonde good, it also suggests that the book was aimed at northern Europeans expected to identify to some extent with the fair deities.

Antiquity is represented as a site of fantastic adventures and extremes, including extremes of violence and monstrosity. This is tempered by the humorous tone of many of the accompanying illustrations and their speech-bubbles. The twelve tasks lend themselves to this impression of antiquity, and the book endorses it by including the ancient tradition of the reason for the tasks (the killing of Hercules' family) and by the wide range of adjectives employed to describe the horror of the monsters (and thus stretch the reader's reading skills and vocabulary).

The gods receive a largely positive characterisation. They occur frequently throughout the book offering help or advice, showing concern for the creatures under their care, or congratulating Hercules on a job well done. This element of the book also ensures that the form of heroism depicted is one that accepts aid, follows good advice, and values the opinions of others. This element tempers what is otherwise a very consistent prioritising of an aggressive, active form of heroism – there is much on Hercules' strength and little on



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| | overcoming nerves or using guile.<br><br>Hera is the only goddess to be represented in a hostile manner, a characterisation created by the focus on her jealousy of Hercules, especially as this comes without any explanation. Female characters mostly take the part of beautiful advisors (Athene, Artemis, the priestess). The Amazons are depicted in a manner that ridicules them to some extent, as the illustrations take their humour from the Amazons being larger than yet flirtatious with Hercules' companions. Men who fail to live up to Hercules' standard are ridiculed in a similar way – shown being humorously defeated by Amazons or amusingly frightened by the various monsters Hercules' captures.<br><br>Overall, classical antiquity here is a place of varied environments filled with monsters and other outrageous creatures that a larger than life hero can overcome and thus prove himself. |
| Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts | Apples of the Hesperides Architecture Artemis Athena Atlas Centaur(s) Cerberus Charon Crete Diana Gods Hades Hera Heracles Hercules Hermes Hydra Juno Katabasis Laurel Wreath Minerva Minos Persephone Proserpina Twelve Labours of Heracles Underworld Zeus |
| Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture | Authority Death Family Friendship Gender expectations/construction Heroism Justice Morality Oppression Parents (and children) Violence |
| Further Reading | Blanshard, Alastair, *Hercules, a Heroic Life,* London: Granta Books, 2006.<br><br>Rawlings, Louis, and Bowden, Hugh, *Herakles and Hercules. Exploring a Graeco-Roman Divinity*, London: Classical Press of Wales, 2005.<br><br>Stafford, Emma, *Herakles*, London: Routledge, 2012.<br><br>*Heracles*: The animation based on myths of Heracles at the |



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panoply.org.uk (accessed:June 6, 2018).

The animation based on myths of Heracles at the panoply.org.uk (accessed:June 6, 2018).

Our Mythical Childhood and Panoply Vase Animation Project at the panoply.org.uk (accessed: June 6, 2018).

Addenda

New editions: 2003; 2007.



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