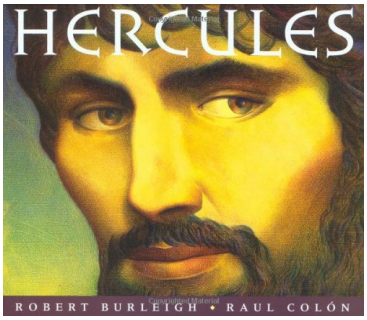
Zoia Barzakh, "Entry on: Hercules by Robert Burleigh , Raul Colón ", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/520. Entry version as of November 11, 2026.

Robert Burleigh , Raul Colón

Hercules

United States (1999)

TAGS: Athena Cerberus Charon Hades Hera Hercules Iphicles Persephone Sisyphus



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General information	
Title of the work	Hercules
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1999
First Edition Details	Robert Burleigh, *Hercules.* HMH Books for Young Readers, 1999.
ISBN	0152016678
Genre	Adaptations, Myths, Picture books
Target Audience	Children (Children 7–10)
Author of the Entry	Zoia Barzakh, Bar-Ilan University, zoia_barzakh@mail.ru
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Lisa Maurice, Bar-Ilan University, lisa.maurice@biu.ac.il Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

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Creators



Robert Burleigh , b. 1936
(Author)

Robert Burleigh is a Chicago-based writer of poetry, plays, and fiction for both adult and child readers. He studied at DePauw University in Indiana and later at Columbia University, graduating with an MA in Humanities. Since the early 1990s he has published more than 40 children's books. His diverse body of work includes stories about sport, science and art, and features both biography and historical fiction (Burleigh's books run a broad gamut, from stories geared for pre-schoolers to survival stories and biographies aimed at seven to eleven-year-olds). In addition to *Pandora* (2002), Burleigh has collaborated with Raul Colón on a retelling of another Greek myth, *Hercules* (1999), which was honoured as a Smithsonian Notable Book. Many of Burleigh's other works have received literary awards and recognition.

He is also a visual artist, working under the name Burleigh Kronquist. His paintings, drawings and sculptures have featured in a number of exhibitions in Chicago and other parts of the United States.

Source:

The author's personal website (accessed July 12, 2018).

Bio prepared by Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com and Zoia Barzakh, Bar-Ilan University, zoia_barzakh@mail.ru

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Raul Colón , b. 1952
(Illustrator)

Raul Colón was inspired to become an artist after chronic childhood asthma kept him frequently housebound, reading comics and drawing. Born in New York City, his family moved to Caguas, Puerto Rico in the 1960s, where he studied commercial art. He returned to the US to work at an educational television centre in Florida, designing puppets and short animations, before returning to New York, where he still lives. His soft, richly coloured illustrations in pencil and watercolour employ a scratchboard technique to give depth and texture to his work. He has illustrated children's books with Robert Burleigh, Jane Yolen and Robert Daniel San Souci, and wrote and illustrated *Orion Blasts Off!* (2004), the story of a boy who learns to use his imagination after his computer breaks down. Colón has been recognised with a Golden Kite Award for Dona Flor (2013, with Pat Mora) and both Gold and Silver medals from the Society of Illustrators. In 2013 the Orlando Museum of Art hosted *Tall Tales and Huge Hearts: Raul Colón*, a solo exhibition of his work.

Bio prepared by Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com

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Additional information

Summary

This is a picture book retelling of the myth of Hercules' descent into Hades and capture of Cerberus, aimed at children. The book starts with a list of characters, both humans and non-humans, and a short explanation of each.

The book concentrates on the last and most dangerous labor of Hercules, namely his descent into Hades and abduction of Cerberus, but the author uses the opportunity to retell the rest of Hercules' labours for his young readers as well. The overall framework of the myth is given in a very short prosaic foreword. The rest of the book is written in blank verse. The previous eleven labors of Hercules are given in retrospective, as recollections of the hero entering the Underworld. The hero is guided and helped by Athena, who is depicted as his patron goddess, reminiscent of her role in Homer's *Odyssey*. The book is full of detailed poetical descriptions:

"The great palace of King Hades looms up.

Its high spires, covered with pure black marble

Shine with a gloomy dark glow."

The description of the struggle between Hercules and Cerberus is both vivid and poetic:

"Round and around and around.

Growls and heaves and cries.

The death dance in the valley of the dead.

…

Hands clench and fangs bite down in the final struggle.

Man and monster.

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Monster and man".

In his trip to the Underworld Hercules meets mythical characters connected with the place, which gives the author an opportunity to tell his young readers about Sisyphus, Radamanthus, Persephone, etc.

The dominating motif of the book is overcoming fear and doing something that seems beyond one's potential. The poet makes his Hercules admit in the beginning that this last task frightens even him:

"This is the place, he thinks.

I must go there.

I am afraid.

But also – I am not afraid,

For I am Hercules".

The final verses of the poem sound as an echo of this confession:

"O I have done what I feared I could not do,

I, Hercules".

Analysis

Both text with its ballad form and pictures, made in Colón's unique technique, famous for its reach texture, are highly emotional and remarkable for their subtle colouring. The events of the myth are given from the hero's perspective and the changes of his mood and emotional state are often emphasized. The authors' imagination picks the moments of various emotional impact – the start of the journey with its feeling of suspense, the grim gates of Hades, the first moment

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Hercules sees Cerberus, the extremely stiff fight, the peaceful moment of rest just after accomplishing the heroic deed – and illustrate it in words and colours in a screenshot manner.

The heroic image of Hercules, which is central for the book – indeed, the figure of the hero occupies the central place in all illustrations – must be extremely appealing for the young readers as a figure of superman, larger-than-life and yet capable for human emotions. His attitude towards the deed he has to accomplish illustrates perfectly the famous quote "Bravery is not the absence of fear, but the will to overcome it" – and this must be very appealing to the young audience, since the topic of courage and overcoming fears and anxieties of different kind is essential to psychosocial development of middle childhood and early adolescence.

Colón's illustrating technique is perfectly fitting for both the topic and the purposes of the book. The illustrations are done on watercolor paper with watercolor washes, colored pencils and litho pencils, with supplementary use of certain etching techniques. This complex method helps to create sense of volume and also to make a picture to resemble fresco or a Fayum portrait. This enables the painter to create the atmosphere, paradoxically combining antiquity and vividness.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Athena Cerberus Charon Hades Hera Hercules Iphicles Persephone Sisyphus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Adversity Death Heroism Masculinity

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