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Jose Alfonso Ocampo Ruiz , Martin Powell

The Adventures of Hercules

United States (2009)

TAGS: Alcmene Artemis Cretan Bull Deianeira Eurystheus Hera Heracles Hercules Hippolyta Hydra Iphitos of Oechalia Nemean Lion Nessus Olympus Omphale Pholus Zeus



Cover courtesy of Capstone Press.

General information	
Title of the work	The Adventures of Hercules
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2009
First Edition Details	Martin Powell, *The Adventures of Hercules.* Bloomington: Stone Arch Books, 2009, 72 pp.
ISBN	9781434213846
Genre	Action and adventure comics, Adaptations, Myths
Target Audience	Children (Ages 10–14)
Author of the Entry	Tikva Schein, Bar-Ilan University, tikva.blaukopf@gmail.com
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Creators



Jose Alfonso Ocampo Ruiz , b. 1975
(Illustrator)

Jose Alfonso Ocampo Ruiz is from Tabasco, Mexico and has been illustrating comic books since the age of 17. He has illustrated Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (Graphic Revolve (Graphic Novels)) and *Dracula* (Graphic Revolve) as well as *The Time Machine*, *War of the Worlds*, *Pinnochio* and other titles.

Sources:

comicbookdb.com (accesed: September 3, 2018);

Profile at the scholastic.com (accesed: September 3, 2018).

Bio prepared by Tikva Schein, Bar-Ilan University, tikva.blaukopf@gmail.com



Martin Powell (Author)

Martin Powell writes on a range of themes, penning hundreds of stories in various formats. He has been writing freelance since 1986. His clients include Disney, Marvel, DC, Dark Horse, and Capstone Books. His works have received international acclaim. His graphic novel *Scarlet in Gaslight* earned a highly coveted Eisner Award nomination for his depiction of Sherlock Holmes.

Powell's works can also be found online as the wording for twelve Edgar Rice Burroughs online comic strips, contributions for which he won the Golden Lion Award in 2017 and which match other

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contributions in number. Powell is the pen behind Superman, Batman, Popeye the Sailor, Dracula, Frankenstein, and Tarzan of the Apes.

He lives in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

Sources:

Official blog (accessed: November 2, 2018);

Profile at the amazon.com (accessed: November 2, 2018);

Profile at the blogger.com (accessed: November 2, 2018);

edgarriceburroughs.com (accessed: November 2, 2018).

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Questionnaire

1. What drew you to writing / working with Classical Antiquity and what challenges did you face in selecting, representing, or adapting particular myths or stories?

All creative writing is challenging, which is what makes it such fun. Getting to bring Hercules to life for a new youthful audience was an enormous honor for me. I'd already had about a dozen children's books published by Capstone when they approached me to write something about Greek Mythology. I'd loved the subject ever since my older brother introduced it to me when I was nine years old, so I was very excited. My editor had four different books planned on the classic Greek Myths, and all were fascinating, but when I saw Hercules on the list I immediately requested it. Writing that book became one of my most satisfying times at my keyboard.

2. Why do you think classical / ancient myths, history, and

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literature continue to resonate with young audiences?

I suspect mythology will always fascinate young readers. There's a definite connection between Hollywood's contemporary super-hero films and the ancient myths. It's an archetype that resounds in all of us, particularly before we grow into a more cynical mindset. Obviously, younger audiences today are keenly drawn to adventures of magic and heroism more than ever. I imagine they always will be.

3. Do you have a background in classical education (Latin or Greek at school or classes at the University)? What sources are you using? Are there any books that made an impact on you in this respect?

Actually, my formal education is in paleontology, but I'd wanted to be a professional writer since I was five years old. I used a couple different classic source books while composing my Hercules re-telling, including Bulfinch's *Mythology* and Edith Hamilton's *Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes*. I grew up reading and re-reading both volumes, so it was a delight for me to return to them professionally. Ms. Hamilton's book, in particular, was always a very special inspiration for me while I was growing up.

4. How concerned were you with "accuracy" or "fidelity" to the original?

I tried to keep my re-telling of the myths as accurate as possible for the medium I was working with. Of course, all legends vary somewhat depending upon the era in which they're being told. I carefully chose aspects from different sources which I felt would provide the most dramatic impact upon a young reader. And, of course, I added a bit from myself, too.

5. Are you planning any further forays into classical material?

I would love to. Hopefully, the opportunity will present itself again. And thanks so much for your interest.

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Additional information

Summary

In five comic book chapters, Martin Powell tells the story of Hercules and his adventures through the medium of a comic. With a page-length section 'About Hercules' prefacing the comic, the story is focussed on the retelling of Hercules' adventures by a sixth-century Ithacan man to his grandchildren.

The first chapter, entitled 'Son of Zeus,' details the vanquishing of the seemingly invulnerable Nemean Lion by Hercules and then the subsequent second labour, the slaying of the Hydra. The second chapter, 'Death of a Friend', show the third and fourth labours; 'The King's Command', the third chapter, the fifth to ninth labours as well as the love story between Hercules and Hippolyte, queen of the Amazons. The tenth and eleventh labours are retold in 'A Mighty Burden' as well as mentioning the mourning of Hercules for Hippolyte.

The final chapter, 'Legends Never Die' contains Hercules' final labour in the Land of the Dead as well his reunification with the dead Hippolyte who offers him a reassurance of her love and that they will be together again. This spurs Hercules on for his final task. The story ends with Hercules' appearance to save the sixth century Ithacan children from the attack of a mighty creature.

Analysis

Powell nests the story of Hercules in the retelling by a man to his grandchildren in sixth-century Ithaca. Through vivid and exciting graphics, Powell brings to life the story of Hercules' adventures. He introduces the graphic element with a page of text outlining the Hercules myth. Powell includes details such as the relationship between the centaur Pholus and Hercules and the latter's subsequent desire to avenge Pholus' death.

Ocampo Ruiz and Powell dedicate fifteen frames to the Pholus story, a focus which is rarely given to this element of Hercules' adventures, especially not in children's literature. Described as a 'great friend' (p. 30), Pholus represents an external focaliser of Hercules' power and fame – 'I hear the name of Hercules praised all over Greece' (p. 25) – as well as his general amicability – Hercules as half man, half god, is friends with all manner of beasts and man. By drawing out the Pholus

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aspect, we see Hercules as a being wounded by loss: the vulnerability of Hercules' grief over Pholus' death enables him to appear a more captivating character. The death of Pholus expands the characterisation of Hercules: this is no half god comprised of mere brawn; Hercules has a compassionate, loving, loyal side to him. Powell's sympathetic reading of the Pholus-Hercules friendship gives this mythical rendering added emotional depth. This depth of characterization is continued with the love story around Hippolyte.

The love-story meeting of Hercules and Hippolyte and the ensuing connection (p. 38–45 and later) adds a very human aspect to Hercules. Although the characters of Greek myth are often presented as callous and indifferent to human suffering heartless and lacking in trust, Hercules is presented as a sensitive soul.

After the narrator's comment on page 39, 'Hercules and Hippolyte became inseparable', Hippolyte offers Hercules companionship and we see Hercules' desire to be close in love to another person. When the two personages reminisce on their earliest memories (p. 40–41) we are offered a tender, pathos-inducing portrayal of a hero who is 'haunt[ed]' by the guilt that lies on his heart. This depiction, as evinced by Hercules' willingness to open up to Hippolyte where we (in our role as believing readers) do not see him trust another, shows Hercules as a more complex character than other renditions allow. Powell humanizes the story of Hercules by adding a relatable emotional level throughout. Important to note, in contrast to other popularized versions of the myth, Hercules is not even indirectly responsible for Hippolyte's death; the spear that kills her is thrown by another's hand and not by his order. This innocence on Hercules' part makes him a more desirable model to relate to.

Through changes of scene to the sixth century Ithacan children commenting on the exploits of Hercules, Powell enables comment on Hercules and makes him relatable and accessible for the readers of the book. The target audience is of children between the ages of 7 and 15 though an older audience can certainly enjoy it too. The added emotional characterisation means that children recognise that being a superhero does not mean lack of empathy. It's not a case of brawn without brain (or heart) – though there are plenty of illustrations of Hercules' great strength, embellished in the comic modus of 'splash', 'biffff', 'skrrrr', 'snap' etc. Through this added angle on Hercules, the readership gains an educational message via this thoughtful retelling of myth.

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Fast-moving frames keep the level of tension high, maintaining the readers' interest. Flash-backs (p. 40, Hercules looking back to his own childhood) and prolepses (p. 59, Hercules meeting Hippolyte in the Land of the Dead, 'As Hercules held Hippolyte he knew that someday they would be together again') enable range of temporal focus and create a space for the myth that is wider than the time and space of the original act itself.

The blue/grey/brown colour scheme as a whole provides a serious backdrop to the story so that the lines of the illustrations give the source of strength. Changes of time period (as with the Ithacans and in the Land of the Dead) are depicted in various shades.

The goddess Artemis is distinguished from the other characters by her red hair (p. 21–23). A break from the colour palette, the flash of her hair on the page makes the reader alert to her singularity and immortal status.

Powell evokes much pathos around the story of Hercules through the visual elements as well as the details he includes through the story he weaves. Powell manages to develop a strong narrative thread between the chapters. He integrates love, friendship, revenge, forgiveness, anger into a strong story.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Alcmene Artemis Cretan Bull Deianeira Eurystheus Hera Heracles Hercules Hippolyta Hydra Iphitos of Oechalia Nemean Lion Nessus Olympus Omphale Pholus Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adversity Childhood Death Emotions Expectations Friendship Good deeds Heroism Isolation/loneliness Love Magic powers Revenge Storytelling Values
Further Reading	Hoena, Blake, *The 12 Labors of Hercules: A Graphic Retelling. Ancient Myths,* North Mankato, Minn.: Capstone Press, 2015.

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Powell, Martin, *The Adventures of Hercules: A Graphic Novel. Graphic Resolve*, North Mankato, Minn.: Stone Arch Books, 2014.

Van Lente, Fred, *Hercules. Heroes and Legends,* New York: Rosen Publishing, 2015.

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