Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: Here Comes Hercules! (Hopeless Heroes, 1) by Nick Roberts, Stella Tarakson ", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/814. Entry version as of November 15, 2026.

Nick Roberts , Stella Tarakson

Here Comes Hercules! (Hopeless Heroes, 1)

United Kingdom (2017)

TAGS: Cerberus Hera Hercules Hermes Zeus



Cover courtesy of Sweet Cherry Publishing.

General information	
Title of the work	Here Comes Hercules! (Hopeless Heroes, 1)
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2017
First Edition Details	Stella Tarakson, *Hopeless Heroes: Here Comes Hercules!* Leicester: Sweet Cherry Publishing, 2017, 208 pp.
ISBN	9781782263555
Genre	Fantasy fiction
Target Audience	Children (6–10)
Author of the Entry	Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com

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Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Lisa Maurice, Bar-Ilan University, lisa.maurice@biu.ac.il Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com

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Creators



Nick Roberts (Illustrator)

Nick Roberts is an English illustrator. He likes cartoons, monsters, robots.

Source:

Official website (accessed: January 23, 2019)

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



Stella Tarakson , b. 1968 (Author)

Stella Tarakson is an Australian author of Greek descent, who writes for children as well as adults; her work includes both fiction and non-fiction books. She began her career working at a law firm, but then decided to focus on writing. She won several awards for her books. In her blog, she writes that she has been interested in Greek mythology for a long time; she also writes: “Like many Greek Australians, I grew up on a steady diet of Greek mythology. Herakles and Theseus were as familiar to me as Cinderella and Snow White. That’s why I’m so excited to add my voice to the stories that have been told and retold over the millennia.”

Sources:

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Official website (accessed: January 23, 2019);

evelyneholingue.com (accessed: February 26, 2019).

Bio prepared by Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University,
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Questionnaire

1. What drew you to writing the *Hopeless Heroes stories*? How did you develop your particular literary style / idiom / aesthetic for your works inspired by Classical Antiquity? (These are overlapping questions, so feel free to answer them as one)

Being the daughter of Greek migrants, I've grown up on a steady diet of Greek mythology. When I was very young, my father used to tell me many of the tales – I suppose he was continuing the great oral tradition of our ancestors! Books came next, and I'm lucky to still have most of them. My parents were very keen to pass their culture and identity on to their children, especially in a new country far from home. Now that my own children are growing, I also feel the need to "pass it on", keeping the link alive for future generations. I feel incredibly fortunate to be able to share these stories with a wider audience, and it's wonderful to have readers from all around the world enjoying my books! My literary style is not traditional, though. I've also grown up with a love of British comedy, which comes out quite strongly in the *Hopeless Heroes* series.

2. Why do you think classical / ancient myths, history, and literature continue to resonate with young audiences?

The myths continue to resonate with young audiences because we've never lost our fascination with monsters and heroes. Greek mythology is filled with passion and excitement, the characters are larger than life, and there are continuing parallels with our lives today. The human condition hasn't changed in thousands of years and I don't think it ever will.

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

I don't have a classical education – I have degrees in Economics and Law from the University of Sydney – but I've always been interested in the classics. Once I started writing *Hopeless Heroes*, I decided I wanted to learn more. I've re-enrolled at USyd part-time and I've been studying ancient history and classical archaeology. It's wonderful to be able to study something purely out of interest! My main source is Barry Powell's *Classical Myth* published by Pearson. I also like the website theoi.com (accessed: March 19, 2019).

4. Did you think about how aspects of Classical Antiquity (myth, history) would translate for young readers?

As you know, many Greek myths are rather Adult Only. I had to think very carefully about how to be age-appropriate, while staying as true to the myths as possible. I avoided the bloodier tales, and edged carefully around sexual issues. For instance, Hera hates Hercules (yes, I had to use the more familiar Roman name) because she's jealous of his beautiful mother. Which is true. However, I didn't come right out and say why! Even so, children learn a lot about Greek history and mythology from the books. Many teachers in the UK have been reading them to their classes as part of the class studies. I'm actually teaching by stealth!

5. How do you go about working with the comic / comedic aspects of classical antiquity?

I've incorporated comedy by accentuating the flaws of the Greek heroes and by placing them in unexpected situations. For example, Hercules is super-strong but not exactly super-smart. In book 1, which is set in the modern day, he insists on using skills he developed while performing the Twelve Labours. Sadly they don't work so well when it comes to tackling housework and school bullies.

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

Yes, I'm definitely planning further forays! I've already had a few plays published in the *Australian Readers Theatre*, (Blake Education), that combine the classics with Australian history. I've written *The Flying Finish*, where Pegasus and Bellerophon enter the Melbourne Cup; *The Gold Rush Touch*, where a goldfields prospector succumbs to the Midas Touch; and *Pandora's Ballot Box*, where a young girl encounters the suffragette movement. They bring the classics to life in a new way, and show that they are still very relevant and relatable today!

7. Anything else you think we should know?

The *Hopeless Heroes* books aren't just retelling of the myths – that's been done many times before. The stories begin when 10-year-old Tim Baker accidentally breaks an ancient amphora, and discovers that Hercules had been trapped inside it for thousands of years. Once repaired, the vase allows Tim to travel back to Ancient Greece. He befriends Hercules' daughter Zoe (an addition to the traditional myths), and together they encounter famous heroes, escape bizarre monsters, solve baffling puzzles, and even defy the gods themselves. I only hope they don't hold grudges …

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Additional information

Summary

This is book 1 in the *Hopeless Heroes* series. This is series of portal-fantasy adventures in which a timid boy travels to the world of ancient myth by means of a magic vase, and learns to be brave through adventures with classical heroes. In this book we meet our protagonist, Tim Baker. We are initially informed that Tim's mother works long hours to provide for her family, so he needs to help with the housework. While cleaning, Tim accidentally breaks a large Greek vase, decorated with a scene of a struggle between a man and a bull.

Suddenly a huge man appears in the room, and it appears that when Tim broke the vase he set free the heroic Hercules, who was trapped inside it for centuries. Hercules, who can only be seen by Tim, offers to help Tim with his chores and even goes to his school, causing various mishaps and incidents. Tim then succeeds in solving a riddle on the ancient vase and sends Hercules home. After Hercules is gone, Tim discovers that Hera and Hermes broke into his house but Tim refuses to give them the vase.

Analysis

Quite early in the book we are told that Tim's mother works long hours and that he stays home alone., which instantly enlists the readers' empathy. Tim seems like a dependable boy despite his young age and also a character whom the readers hope will find happiness in his life, as it seems obvious he has been through some difficult times. A hint of this can be seen when the author describes the house: "It was like living in a museum. A reminder of better times, the jumbled collection now sat around gathering dust." (p. 8). The dust recalls the past and is a sharp reminder of deterioration, from a wonderful life to the current more challenging reality. In later books we will find out that Tim's father passed away long ago. We also learn that Tim is being bullied at school by a classmate called Leo. Therefore the empathy for this young hero grows, and the author prepares the ground for the rest of the series in which Tim will discover that he is a true hero and will learn to believe in himself and in his strength. His time with Hercules makes him more confident so that he is able to stand up to the class bully, and later Hermes, using his brains and his quick thinking.

The author makes fun of the knowledge of Greek myth, when Tim tries

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to remember if he saw Hercules in a cartoon somewhere. This series is obviously meant to teach some Greek mythology, but also plays on the reality vs. fiction theme; is Greek mythology just stories, as Tim thinks? On the other hand, Hercules is real, but then again, this is a fictional story. This meta-literary approach allows the young readers to fantasize that these myths could somehow be true. This theme is evoked once more when Tim's mother arrives and sees the damage Hercules had caused to the garden, but she does not see Hercules himself. She does not believe Tim's story either; "'You know the difference between make-believe and the truth, don't you?' Mum asked. (p. 43). So we are left wondering; did Tim imagine everything out of loneliness? Is Hercules an imaginary friend? Yet Hercules has the perfect answer; only Tim can see him because he set him free. Thus the boundaries between reality and imagination are blurred. The adult mother does not see the mythical hero, raising the question of whether she stopped believing in the ancient stories. The important thing is that for Tim, Hercules is real, as he is for the readers; they, unlike his mother, share his secret and his adventure and can fully relate to it.

Hercules is revealed to be more brawn than brain, but he is also kind and caring. His character is built up as a father-figure for Tim. Most importantly, Tim is no longer alone when he is with Hercules, and Hercules is a miraculous friend to him. Interestingly, Tim breaks the vase as he rushes to answer the phone when his mother calls to apologize for running late. When Hercules then appears, it is as if his role is to replace Tim's parent momentarily. He tries to help him and protect him and his presence emphasized by the absence of Tim's mother. When Hercules then reveals to Tim that he felt that his own father was not pleased with him, Tim takes on the role of caring adult and encourages him, demonstrating that even a strong hero can have hidden hurts and anxieties and showing that Tim can also be a strong person.

It should be noted however that the reader is encouraged to be sympathetic towards Tim's mother as well. Since Tim's mother is a writer whose manuscript got rejected, there is clear influence here by the author, she is just sharing her own disappointments and making them part of the story as well. The author then combines the two narratives of the disappointed mother and the fiction-reality theme when Tim confides in his mother and tell her about his adventures with Hercules, which she decides is a wonderful idea for a story.

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Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Cerberus Hera Hercules Hermes Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Family Friendship Heroism Magic
Addenda	The entry is based on the Kindle 2018 edition.

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