Jean Menzies, "Entry on: Hercules: Bampots and Heroes by Bob Dewar, Matthew Fitt", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/978. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

Bob Dewar , Matthew Fitt

Hercules: Bampots and Heroes

United Kingdom (2005)

TAGS: Amazons Augeas Cerberus Cretan Bull Diomedes (of Thrace) Erymanthian Boar Eurystheus Geryon Hera Hercules Hesperides Hippolyta Hydra Nemean Lion Stymphalian Birds Zeus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Hercules: Bampots and Heroes
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
Original Language	Scots
First Edition Date	2005
First Edition Details	Matthew Fitt, *Hercules: Bampots and Heroes*, ill. Bob Dewar. Edinburgh: Itchy Coo, 2005, 57 pp.
ISBN	9781910959589
Genre	Picture books
Target Audience	Children (Children 9+ (according to the publisher's website))
Author of the Entry	Jean Menzies, University of Roehampton, menziesj@roehampton.ac.uk
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Creators



Bob Dewar (Illustrator)

Bob Dewar is a Scottish cartoonist and illustrator whose first published cartoon strip was featured in Scouting magazine when he was sixteen years old. He has had a prolific career since, which includes illustrating more than forty books for Oxford University Press, being the ghost cartoonist for Dennis the Menace, and working as the political cartoonist for the *Scotsman* newspaper for fifteen years.

Sources:

doubtfiregallery.com (accessed: March 13, 2020);

scotsman.com (accessed: March 13, 2020).

Bio prepared by Jean Menzies, University of Roehampton, menziesj@roehampton.ac.uk



Matthew Fitt (Author)

Matthew Fitt is an award-winning author and translator, as well as an expert in Scots language education. Fitt is originally from Dundee, Scotland, and studied Literature at Edinburgh University. He has published various novels, picture books, and poetry collections as well as having translated popular works such as *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* into Scots. In 2002 he co-founded the Scots language children's imprint called Itchy Coo at Black & White Publishing, a publishing house based in Scotland, with editor James Robertson. Fitt is active in both publishing and education, with

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outreach on behalf of the Scots language an important part of his work.

Sources:

Author's website (accessed: March 13, 2020).

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Additional information

Summary

Hercules: Bambots and Heroes is a comedic account of the twelve labours of Hercules by Matthew Fitt written in Scots, one of the two indigenous languages to Scotland recognised by the UN. While Scottish Gaelic developed in the highlands, Scots originated in the lowlands of Scotland. Although Scots is still commonly used throughout the lowlands it is often blended with English by native speakers. The book itself is a product of Itchy Coo, an imprint of Black & White publishing founded in 2002. Itchy Coo publishes literature in the Scots language for children and young people. Their mission statement is to promote the Scots language and help improve young people's Scots reading and writing skills.

Hercules: Bambots and Heroes introduces Hercules' and his background to the reader before proceeding to recount his attempts to complete the twelve tasks set to him by King Eurystheus, son of Hera, as recompense for murdering his own wife and children. Each chapter covers a different task from the slaying of the Nemean lion to the capture of Cerberus. The story itself is accompanied by elaborate and amusing illustrations by Bob Dewar, which bring to life the authors words.

Chapters:

1. Hercules.
2. The Twelve Trauchles (tr: The Twelve Tasks).
3. Trauchle Wan: The Lion o Nemea (tr: Task One: The Lion of Nemea).
4. Trauchle Twa: The Hydra (tr: Task Two: The Hydra).
5. Trauchle Three: The Cerynitian Hart (tr: Task Three: The Cerynitian Haart.
6. Trauchle Fower: The Erymanthian Boar (tr: Taask Four: The Erymanthian Boar).
7. Trauchle Five: The Muckin o Augeas' Byre (tr: Task Five: The Cleaning of Augeas' Stable).
8. Trauchle Six: The Stymphalian Craws (tr: Task Six: The Stymphalian Crows).
9. Trauchle Seven: The Cretan Buhl (tr: Task Seven: The Cretan Bull).
10. Trauchle Eicht: The Cuddies o Diomedes (tr: Task Eight: The Horses of Diomedes).

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11. Trauchle Nine: Hippolyta's Belt (tr: Task Nine: Hippolyta's Belt).
12. Trauchle Ten: The Kye o Geryon (tr: Task Ten: The Cattle of Geryon).
13. Trauchle Eleeven: The Gowden Aipples o the Hesperides (tr: Task Eleven: The Golden Apples of the Hesperides).
14. Trauchle Twelve: Cerberus the Fufty-Heidit Dug (tr: Task Twelve: Cerberus the Fifty-Headed Dog).

*All translations are my own.

Analysis

As with all of Itchy Coo's catalogue, *Hercules: Bampots and Heroes* is intended to help promote Scots language and expand younger readers' Scots vocabulary. These readers may have experience with Scots at home; however, they are less likely to encounter it in formal educational situations like school where the curriculum is focused on English. Texts such as *Hercules: Bampots and Heroes*, therefore, take the time to treat Scots as a subject as serious as any other and educate its readers through exposure. While *Hercules: Bampots and Heroes* is written in Scots I have, however, provided English translations of the sections quoted here to assist non-Scots-language-speakers – Scots quotations are in *italics*, with English translation in brackets.

The book's educational intention does not overshadow the hilarity of Matthew Fitt's adaptation of Hercules' twelve *trauchles* (tasks). In fact, the book actively uses comedy to engage its young audience (9+) with the material. In some instances, this is through the use of common contemporary Scottish phrases or terms aimed specifically at modern audiences. For example, to highlight his cowardice Eurystheus is regularly described as hiding in a *ginger bottle* in place of an amphora or jar. More common on the west coast of Scotland, ginger is a term used to refer to fizzy drinks or soda and therefore not a traditional Scots word but rather modern slang. Other instances of comedy meanwhile are updates to the Ancient Greek backdrop that simply involve more recent Scottish cultural references. For example, Hercules' description of the smell radiating from Augeus' stables in chapter five *The Muckin o Augeas' Byre* (the cleaning of Augeas' Stable):

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"Further doon the road, he got anither whuff o the same smell, auld milk and deid fish but strang this time wi a dose o rotten neeps flung in."

(Further down the road, he got another whiff of the same smell, old milk and dead fish but strong this time with a dose of rotten swedes flung in.)

Neeps (swedes) are popular throughout Scotland and traditionally served alongside haggis and potatoes, helping them develop a bit of a cultural reputation inside and outside the country. The reference is therefore intended to resonate with a contemporary Scottish reader. These references, as well as numerous mentions of glass *windaes* (windows), which did not exist in Ancient Greece, forgo accuracy for humour based on the Scots language and what modern readers might find funny.

Elsewhere, while Scots is the language in use it is not the basis for the joke. For example, when Hercules is finishing cleaning Augeus' *cuddie byre* (horse stable) Fitt describes the various ephemerae he finds under all the dung:

"Hercules guddled in the burn and pulled oot a bunch o roostit hoose keys and Augeas' son, Phyleus, looking mair like a drooned rat than a prince. He fund a set o wallies as weel which turned oot tae belang tae King Augeus."

(Hercules fished in the stream and pulled out a bunch of rusty house keys and Augeus son, Phyleus, looking more like a drowned rat than a prince. He found a set of false teeth as well which turned out to belong to King Augeus.)

The stream which Hercules diverted to clean out the stables, and consequently runs through the grounds of Augeus' castle, now contains everything the king lost in there. For comical effect, this is described as including his rusty house keys, his dentures, and even his

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child.

Otherwise the story told throughout *Hercules: Bampots and Heroes* adheres to the major plot points of the ancient versions of the myth, as recorded in the ancient sources. Hercules is the son of Zeus, *heid bummer o* (ruler of) the universe, and a mortal woman. From the beginning Hera, Zeus' wife, hates Hercules. One day when Hercules is a grown man she made his *heid bile up wi rage* (head boil up with rage), driving him to murder his wife and children. Hercules then travels to the kingdom of Hera's own son, Eurystheus, where he is set twelve *trauchles* (tasks) to complete, including everything from slaying the Nemean Lion to capturing Cerberus the *fufty-heidit dug* (fifty-headed dog). These stories are some of the most popular myths in modern children's culture, thanks in part to adaptations such as Disney's *Hercules* 1997 and countless others. For that reason, there is a semblance of recognisability to Hercules even for those who are not well versed in the minutiae of the myths. This is perhaps why his adventures were chosen over others when Fitt decided to tell a mythological tale in Scots. *Hercules: Bambots and Heroes,* therefore, manages to engage young readers through its combined use of humour, the combination of Scots language with local dialects, and the contrast of familiar with unfamiliar. Not only does the book carry a comical tone throughout, but it employs language Scottish children may be more familiar with in their homes than in school, from their friends and family as opposed to their English textbooks. Thus, children are given an opportunity to experience the myths of ancient Greece in a recognisable, accessible environment without pomp or ceremony. All of this while expanding their knowledge of the Scots language itself in an environment they would not usually encounter it (ancient Greek myth).

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Amazons Augeas Cerberus Cretan Bull Diomedes (of Thrace) Erymanthian Boar Eurystheus Geryon Hera Hercules Hesperides Hippolyta Hydra Nemean Lion Stymphalian Birds Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant	Humour

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