Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: Apollo's Mystic Message (Hopeless Heroes, 5) by Nick Roberts, Stella Tarakson ", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/677. Entry version as of November 11, 2026.

Nick Roberts , Stella Tarakson

Apollo's Mystic Message (Hopeless Heroes, 5)

United Kingdom (2018)

TAGS: Apollo Athena Epimetheus Hera Hercules Hermes Prometheus Pythia



Cover courtesy of Sweet Cherry Publishing.

General information	
Title of the work	Apollo's Mystic Message (Hopeless Heroes, 5)
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2018
First Edition Details	Stella Tarakson, *Hopeless Heroes: Apollo's Mystic Message*. Leicester: Sweet Cherry Publishing, 2018, 207 pp.
ISBN	9781782263494
Genre	Action and adventure fiction, Fantasy fiction, Fiction
Target Audience	Children (age 6–10)
Author of the Entry	Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com
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

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

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 …

Prepared by Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

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Additional information

Summary

This is book 5 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. At the end of the previous book, Tim Baker was told by his mother's boyfriend (and his school teacher), Larry Green, that there is a vase at the British Museum which depicts an image of a modern boy holding a vase. At first, Tim is reluctant to believe it is possible, yet during a school trip to the museum he views the vase himself.

Tim is afraid that Hera is planning to capture the future Tim in the vase. His suspicion grows when the sneaky Hermes visits his room at night and explains that he wished to save Tim from Hera. The mysterious vase from the museum is suddenly discovered in Tim's house as well. While Larry warns Tim that his time-traveling could affect history, Tim decides to take the risk and consult with his friends, especially his good friend Zoe, who is Hercules' daughter in the series. He then travels back to ancient Greece with this new and mysterious vase and Zoe advises him to ask Apollo, the god of prophecy, for help.

The children arrive at Apollo's temple, yet Apollo is preoccupied with his rock band's approaching concert and he sends them to his Pythia. The Pythia tells them they need to mix wisdom and fire in order for Tim to escape entrapment in the vase. The confused children then decide to consult the wise Athena. Athena puts an enchantment on the vase to protect Tim and also sends them to Epimetheus' pottery shop. At Epimetheus' store they also encounter Prometheus and the Titans agree to help them. In the end, Hera threatens Tim again and he offers to sacrifice himself and go to her so she does not hurt Hercules and his family. For this act he is named a Hero by Athena who helps him defeat Hera so that Tim can go back home.

Analysis

In this adventure Tim discovers his inner strength. Athena's acknowledgment of him at the end of the story as a hero makes him realize that he did act bravely when protecting his friends from Hera, even if he did not fully realize it. Tim put the safety of his friends above his own and that made him a true hero, one which is recognized

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and protected by Athena. This also makes Tim a kind of mythological hero, like Odysseus or Theseus who were also guided by Athena. Thus the humble modern school boy is elevated to the level of mythical heroes, without consciously trying. This is a strong empowering message for young children, especially those who, like Tim, are being bullied at school and face some family trauma. For Tim's, his every day challenges at school and at home (facing the class' bully, helping his mom with the house work) seem as daunting as the heroic trials did to the mythological heroes. Thus the book aims to show children that you can be a hero at home as well; a hero does not necessarily has to fight monsters or go through mythological trials. A hero is also the child who faces difficult challenges every day and succeeds in them and holds on.

Tim's adventure involves mythological elements as well as contemporary juvenile issues. With regard to the latter, Tim starts to confide in Larry once more, and shares his thoughts with him. There is a gradual development in their relationship, as they both try to get to know each other better. While Tim respects Larry's counsel, he also trusts his own instincts. Although he understands why Larry warned him not to interfere with time and history, he is also worried about his friends and decides to visit them. Making his own decisions and taking responsibility for them is also part of his growing heroic nature.

Regarding the presentation of the gods in the story, Athena is presented as the complete opposite of the vengeful Hera. Apollo barely features although he is the eponymous character of this book. He disregards the children who seek his advice and sends them to his Pythia, who also asks for a reward in order to prophesy and does not help them understand the prophecy she utters. This incident teaches Tim and Zoe that they must trust in their own strength and not depend on the gods too much. The gods are not assisting them, but can only offer obscure assistance and the children need to rely on their own strength and team work in order to succeed.

This book emphasizes that Tim's adventures between the past and the present are more closely linked together than he had imagined. The past (Hera) can also become a source of trouble in the present, with which Tim must face. Athena tells him that it is her "duty to help heroes in their quests." (p. 112). This hints that Tim's adventure is not over and that he might be facing a more serious quest of his own. What is he looking for is yet to be determined. Yet we can surmise that his quest is linked to his adventures in the ancient past, but even

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	more to his present day challenges, especially with his mother and her boyfriend, as well as his interaction with the class bully.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Apollo Athena Epimetheus Hera Hercules Hermes Prometheus Pythia
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Family Friendship Heroism Magic Sacrifice

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