



Hercules and His Twelve Labors

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Characters Discussed

Hercules (HUR-kyew-leez), the son of Jupiter and Alcmena. He is a mortal. As a child, he is the object of Juno's jealousy. Through her influence, he is commanded to carry out twelve labors, in hopes that he will be killed in accomplishing one of them: (1) he must strangle the Nemean lion; (2) he must kill the nine-headed hydra; (3) he must capture the dread Erymanthian boar; (4) he must capture a stag with golden antlers and brazen feet; (5) he must get rid of the carnivorous Stymphalian birds; (6) he must cleanse the stables of Augeas; (7) he must capture the sacred bull of Minos; (8) he must drive away the carnivorous mares of Diomedes; (9) he must secure the girdle of Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons; (10) he must bring back the oxen belonging to the monster Geryoneus; (11) he must bring back the golden apples of the Hesperides; and (12) he must bring back Cerberus, the three-headed dog of the Underworld.

Jupiter (JEW-pih-tur), king of the gods, Hercules' father.

Alcmena (alk-MEE-nee), a mortal woman, Hercules' mother.

Juno (JEW-noh), Jupiter's wife. Jealous of mortal Alcmena, she hopes to cause Hercules' death and thus be avenged.

Eurystheus (yew-RIHS-thews), Hercules' cousin. Acting for Juno, he assigns the twelve labors.

Rhadamanthus (rad-uh-MAN- thuhs), Hercules' tutor, killed by Hercules when he punishes the boy.

Amphitryon (am-FIHT-ree-on), Hercules' foster father. He rears the boy as a shepherd, high in the mountains.

Bibliography:

Bonnefoy, Yves, comp. *Mythologies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991. An excellent reference source for the beginner. Includes a concise history and interpretation of the twelve labors of Hercules. An excellent companion to the study of mythology as well as source for bibliographic references to major criticism of myth.

Farnell, Lewis Richard. *Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality*. Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1970. Examines hero worship in Greece. Detailed discussion of the origin, function, and ritual of the cult of Hercules. An exceptional work for a serious study in the meanings and influences of this myth in the Greek culture.

Galinsky, G. Karl. *The Herakles Theme*. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1972. Traces interpretations and characterizations of Hercules through a wide body of literature and art. Examines the twelve labors individually and explores the myth's influence in literature.

Hercules and His Twelve Labors: Hercules and His Twelve Labors

Kirk, G. S. *The Nature of Greek Myths*. Woodstock, N.Y.: Overlook Press, 1975. Traces Hercules' labors in classical literature. Analyzes the meaning of the myth and how it applies within the Greek culture. Excellent source for analyzing the structure and meaning of myth.

Schoo, Jan. *Hercules' Labors*. Chicago: Argonaut, 1969. Includes a detailed description and explanation of each of the twelve labors, as well as bibliographic information. Illustrations supplement discussion of the oral tradition of the Hercules myth. Excellent source.

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