

Hercules: the trials and tribulations

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Hercules: The trials and tribulations Fran Jelin ENG 155 December 17, 2012

Daniel Gonzalez Hercules: The trials and tribulations One of the “ best-known heroes” (History. com, 2012) of all time belongs to Greek mythology’s

Hercules. Born into a powerful pantheon, he had already had enemies at his birth. Known, primarily, for his magnificent strength, Hercules is seen as the handsome hero, but he was also a tragic victim of the gods’ relentless battle over power; a pawn in an epic game. As the games of the gods are cruel and harsh, Hercules’ life as he knew it had been altered, sending him on odyssey that give us the great myths in literature today; giving us the epitome of the mythological hero. Born to the great god, Zeus, and Alcmene, the

granddaughter of another prominent figure in Greek mythology, Perseus

(History. com, 2012), Hercules’ birth was not met approvingly by all on

Mount Olympus. Zeus, being an “ unfaithful husband” (Wilson, 2005), had

gotten another one of his mistresses pregnant. His jealous, goddess wife,

Hera, had intended to kill the child when it was small and sent serpents into

Hercules’ crib. Hercules, being a demi-god, possessed unnatural strength

and killed the snakes. Still, over the years, Hera’s trickery had not ceased.

About the time Hercules was a young man, he had a wife and family of his

own. Hera cast out her most hideous trickery and drove Hercules temporarily

insane, causing him to murder his loving wife and children (History. com,

2012). The jealousy of a great goddess and the tragedy she inflicted on

Hercules changed the course of his young life. Overcome with extreme guilt

and grief over what he had done, Hercules sought redemption from the god,

Apollo, and as penance for his crimes was given 12 “ heroic labors” (History.

com, 2012), or tasks, to complete. Only after he had succeeded at all labors

would his sins be forgiven. Hercules set out to complete these tasks, which any mere mortal would surely have failed at. He arose to, and conquered, every challenge, from killing a lion and various other mythological beasts to bringing back impossible-to-get items. And, while Hera was still very much trying to stop Hercules every step of the way, he overcame every obstacle; every challenge. With that behind him, Hercules was free. While there are many versions to this myth, the underlying theme of redemption is still prevalent. In the years following his quests, Hercules married again and had many children (History. com, 2012). He also had many adventures, but none are comparable to the 12 labors he had previously taken on. His life was never easy, not before the 12 labors and not after it, as the gods were always interfering and causing chaos. Finally, at the end of his life, Zeus “asked Hera to end her anger towards Hercules, which she did” (Wilson, 2005). Legend says that upon Hercules’ death, “Athena carried him to Olympus on her chariot”, where he lives out “eternity with the gods” (History. com, 2012). Hercules “became the greatest mortal on the earth to become a god” (Wilson, 2005) and we remember him with great admiration. Like many of the other mythological Heroes, Hercules possesses strength and courage, and by all accounts, was a handsome man. While he was fathered by Zeus, he was still mortal when he set out on his missions. Many heroes of myth share the fact that they are part god and go on a tremendous journey of some sort. They are usually “born under unusual circumstances” (Leeming, 1990, p. 218, para. 2). Heroes of myth also possess unnatural strength right from birth. Hercules exemplifies the mythological character in this way. When we think of a hero, we imagine someone brave and strong;

larger than life. " In the Greek tradition especially, the hero must often prove himself by accomplishing an impossible series of tasks" (Leeming, 1990, p. 274, para. 2). The journeys and demons they encounter mirror what humankind deals with; the emotions, the struggles, the daily choices between right and wrong. Hercules' labors took him to realms of the underworld; to places dark and twisted, much like the mind can be. While Hercules had many adventures after the 12 labors, none were written about as often. The quest of the 12 labors, for Hercules, was about redemption; it was about atoning for the crimes he committed when he murdered his family under the spell of his wicked stepmother. But the purpose of the mythical quest, in general, is usually about seeking knowledge and overcoming obstacles. " The quest is marked by trials, by confrontations with and the defeat of our inner monsters" (Leeming, 1990, p. 219, para. 3). We lose ourselves in the hero's plight only to find ourselves. Our hero, Hercules, may have started out life as half god-half man, but being fathered by the great Zeus did not keep him from the jealousy of the other gods and goddesses on Mount Olympus. Throughout his life, he conquered one obstacle after another, displaying great strength and courage along the way. Hercules takes us on a relentless voyage of salvation and redemption. " The honorable penance of Hercules and his eventual success is what makes him so special" (Wilson, 2005). His myth is a classical portrait of the mythological hero. " Hercules is still considered to be the perfect mythical character" (Wilson, 2005). GRADE- 19. 0 OUT OF 20. 0 Formatting errors in last paragraph. Corrected. References Ellingson, L. (1999, May 16). Hercules. Retrieved from <http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hercules.html> History.

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