

Child's Play: The Education of Young Hercules in Two Children's Television Programs

The late 1990s proved to be a particularly fertile period for the reception of the Hercules myth in film and television, spearheaded by Disney's 1997 animated feature film "Hercules" and syndicated television's long-running "Hercules: the Legendary Journeys" (1995-99). These projects both spawned television programs specifically tailored for young viewers, and this paper examines these spinoffs, Disney's "Hercules: the Animated Series" (1998) and Fox Kids' "Young Hercules" (1998-99) in terms of classical reception for children. I will first consider what canonical elements of the Hercules myth these programs contain and then examine the innovations they incorporate in their depictions of a young, pre-heroic Hercules. Specifically, this paper considers the characterization of the adolescent Hercules, the circumstances of his education, the roles of his companions, and the construction of maturation. In sum, both the TV shows in question attempt to translate the ancient myth into storytelling for a modern juvenile audience, and the showrunners' adaptations and interpretations constitute a heretofore underappreciated aspect of classical reception, notably as these programs, others like it, and sources of children's entertainment may well be the formative initial encounters that their young viewers have with classical mythology in general and Hercules in particular.