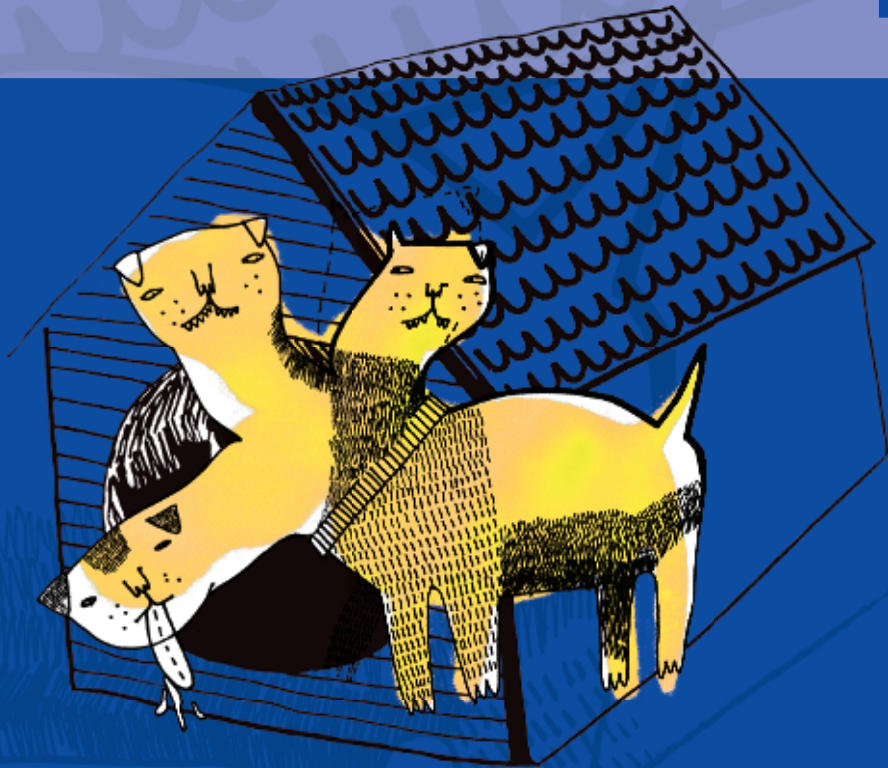


KATARZYNA MARCINIAK (Ed.)

Chasing Mythical Beasts

The Reception
of Ancient Monsters
in Children's and
Young Adults' Culture



Studien zur
europäischen
Kinder- und
Jugendliteratur

Universitätsverlag
WINTER
Heidelberg



Studien zur
europäischen Kinder-
und Jugendliteratur
(SEKL)

*Studies in
European Children's
and Young Adult Literature*

Herausgegeben von / *Edited by*
BETTINA KÜMMERLING-MEIBAUER
ANJA MÜLLER
ASTRID SURMATZ †

Band 8



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Ein zentrales Anliegen dieser Buchreihe besteht darin, literatur- und kulturtheoretisch anspruchsvolle Studien zur Geschichte und Theorie der Kinder- und Jugendliteratur (inklusive anderer Kindermedien) zu veröffentlichen. In ihrer Ausrichtung vertritt die Reihe dezidiert eine europäische Perspektive, d.h. sie versteht sich als Publikationsorgan für Forschung zu den Kinder- und Jugendliteraturen unterschiedlicher europäischer Sprachräume. Auch Studien, die sich mit dem Einfluss außereuropäischer Kinderliteraturen auf die europäische Kinder- und Jugendliteratur befassen, sind willkommen. Die Forschungsperspektive kann komparatistisch geprägt sein oder sich auf eine Einzelphilologie konzentrieren. In dieser Serie können sowohl deutsch- als auch englischsprachige Monographien und Sammelbände veröffentlicht werden. Eingereichte Buchprojekte und Manuskripte werden anonym von zwei ausgewiesenen Fachwissenschaftler/innen begutachtet.

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Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation
in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie;
detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet
über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

ILLUSTRATION ON THE COVER

Maja Abgarowicz

DESIGN OF THE INSERT WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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LAYOUT AND TYPESETTING

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ISBN 978-3-8253-6995-8

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© 2020 Universitätsverlag Winter GmbH Heidelberg
Imprimé en Allemagne · Printed in Germany
Umschlaggestaltung: Klaus Brecht GmbH, Heidelberg
Druck: Memminger Medien Centrum, 87700 Memmingen
Gedruckt auf umweltfreundlichem, chlorfrei gebleichtem
und alterungsbeständigem Papier

Den Verlag erreichen Sie im Internet unter:
www.winter-verlag.de

This publication has received funding from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation within a Humboldt Alumni Award for Innovative Networking Initiatives for the project *Chasing Mythical Beasts... The Reception of Creatures from Graeco-Roman Mythology in Children's and Young Adults' Culture as a Transformation Marker* (2014–2017), the “Artes Liberales Institute” Foundation, and the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202 (2016–2021), *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 led by Katarzyna Marciniak at the Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw. The content of the volume reflects only the authors’ views and no institution is responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

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Age of International Radio: Radio Canada International 1945–2007 (Mosaic Press, 2007). Since 2009, at the Faculty of “Artes Liberales” UW, she has been actively involved in research, conferences, and publications, in particular, within two international programmes: *Classics & Communism*, which has already resulted in several volumes she co-edited, and *Our Mythical Childhood*, led by Katarzyna Marciniak, currently with the support by the ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021). Olechowska’s own research within *OMC* emphasizes reception of Graeco-Roman Classics in contemporary audio-visual culture for youth.

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MICHAEL STIERSTORFER studied at the University of Regensburg (German Studies, Classics, and Science of Education). In his PhD-thesis, published as *Antike Mythologie in der Kinder- und Jugendliteratur der Gegenwart. Unsterbliche Götter- und Heldengeschichten?* (Peter Lang, 2017, Diss.=2016), he investigated the transformations of Graeco-Roman mythological motifs in current children's media with an interdisciplinary approach. Furthermore he is an author of chapters in German schoolbooks for Latin and German. Since September 2016 he has worked as a teacher at Bavarian high schools (gymnasia), since 2018 – in the monastery Schäftlarn near Munich. His research include fantasy, motivation for reading, literary literacy, children's media in school contexts. He co-edited with Markus Janka the volume *Verjüngte Antike: Griechisch-römische Mythologie und Historie in zeitgenössischen Kinder- und Jugendmedien* (Winter, 2017) and authored *Harrius Potter im Latein- (und Deutschunterricht) – Harry Potter als Motivator für die Lektürepraxis* (Shaker, 2017).

ROBERT A. SUCHARSKI is a classical scholar, linguist, and mycenaologist, an Associate Professor at the Faculty of "Artes Liberales" at the University of Warsaw. From 2012 to 2016 he was the Vice Dean for student affairs; in October

2016 he assumed the office of the Dean of the Faculty. He is a Programme Director of the International School in the Humanities – an experimental educational curriculum for young scholars and graduates. His current research includes the edition of the Latin and Polish versions of Jan Kochanowski's poems inspired by Aratos of Soloi and his Ciceronian translations. He also leads the Polish-Ukrainian project *The Innovative University and Leadership*.

KAROLINE THAIDIGSMANN is a postdoctoral researcher and Lecturer of Polish and Russian Literature at the Institute of Slavic Studies at the University of Heidelberg. She studied Slavic Studies, Psychology, and Theology in Heidelberg and Wrocław. In 2009 she completed her doctorate on the experience in Soviet work camps in Russian literature (thesis published as *Lagererfahrung und Identität. Literarische Spiegelungen sowjetischer Lagerhaft in Texten von Varlam Šalamov, Lev Konson, Naum Nim und Andrej Sinjavskij*, Winter, 2009). She is currently working on her second book, about crosswriting and cultural identity in Polish literature since 1989. Her research interests include children's and crossover literature, trauma narratives, and memory studies.

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KATARZYNA MARCINIAK

What Is a (Classical) Monster? The Metamorphoses of the Be(a)st Friends of Childhood

On the 250th anniversary of Alexander von Humboldt's birth

The mythical beasts are our ol' childhood friends. Psychologists consider our early fascination with monsters to be a natural stage in cognitive and emotional development. It usually extends over adolescence and permits us then to address and work through the fears and issues that are typical of identity building and maturation (Asma 2009; cf. also McCarthy 2007; Taylor 2010; Kayyal and Widen 2013; Ttofa 2018, 54–55). What changes is only the character of the creatures that rivet young people. The monsters that are visually scary – ones that originate from myths and fairy tales, skulk in the shadows, and threaten bodily harm or abduction from the child's safe environment – give way to beasts which at first glance may not be recognized as such at all. For the monsters of adolescence know how to be alluring and attractive, and to hide their ferocious selves. They often resemble humans and it is their knack for mimicry that makes them so dangerous. They bring doom through instincts they do not control or by giving to their victims more than they can take, whether in terms of emotions or physical stimulants. It may also happen that they catalyze a metamorphosis into monsters in the people they chase.

One of the most staggering examples of such a metamorphosis is displayed in the German movie for a young audience *Mia und der Minotaurus* [Mia and the Minotaur, 2012] by Florian Schnell. Created in the convention of a feature movie with some elements of anime and awarded the Goldener Spatz [Golden Sparrow] Prize at the Deutsches Kinder-Medien-Festival in Erfurt, it portrays the fates of an eight-year-old girl who is passionate about Greek myths and adores her nearly grown-up (seventeen-year-old) brother Levin. Every evening, the teenager invents a new bedtime story for his sister based on ancient heroes. Yet their carefree game with Classical Antiquity is only a cover-up.

Deep in their hearts the siblings are in mourning. The tales rooted in ancient culture become an anchor for them – a link to their late father who was the one who had first shown them the power of myth. Soon the mythical tales also become a tool of salvation for this shattered family. Levin, barely coping with the trauma, starts taking drugs and plunges into addiction. At first Mia is

unaware of how dire the situation is. She is angry with her mother who, in despair, follows the therapists' advice and throws her son out of the house until he gets clean. The girl looks at the world and the changes in her brother's behaviour through the prism of myths. Hence she believes, for instance, that the beautiful blond-haired drug dealer is a Greek priestess in the service of the Oracle, and that she has come to help Levin in his affliction with a mysterious disease. However, the same myths will soon allow Mia to understand what is really going on.

Schnell perfectly captured the phenomenon of mythology, which today, especially in technologically advanced countries, may seem detached from reality, but in fact remains the fabric of the human world. The millennia-old network of mythological references in art, science, psychology, etc., helps us to grasp the *rerum naturam*, the essence of things. And the monsters of myth are particularly good to think with. As the action develops, Levin undergoes a metamorphosis – in his sister's eyes he more and more resembles the Minotaur – he becomes brutal, violent, inhuman even. Mia combines the knowledge of ancient stories with her observation of Levin's behaviour and unravels the truth. Owing to her familiarity with the myths, she is capable of a mature judgment of the situation. Moreover, she understands that the real monster lurks under the appealing charm of the Oracle, while the Minotaur is a victim – to be saved at all cost. Thus begins a dramatic fight in order to rescue the family...

But there is no one story, for as the Storyteller – from the poignant elaboration of the Greek myths by Jim Henson's team – notes: "There are branches, rooms, [...] corridors, dead ends" (Minghella 1990, 18:12–22:37). We can wander through this whole labyrinth of tales across all the stages of our existence, always to discover and pick up a new fascinating thread. Similarly, there is no one monster, and they do not leave us as soon as we reach adulthood. Nor do they bring only fear and terror to our life. The spectrum of emotions the mythical creatures are able to evoke includes – as Mia's and the many other cases analyzed in this volume demonstrate – pity, compassion, and empathy. Moreover, the beasts ask us uncomfortable questions. They wish to know who we really are, and they put our humanity to the test. They chase us as much as we chase them. Last but not least, they also bring us pure joy and undiluted fun.

It is therefore not surprising that the encounters with mythical monsters change human life to such a great degree (and quite frequently for the good) that some people continue their acquaintance with them also as adults, inspired by their childhood memories and experiences. For example, Newton Artemis Fido Scamander (b. 1897), the author of the seminal handbook *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (1927), was encouraged to pursue his research by his mother, "an enthusiastic breeder of fancy Hippogriffs" (vi). The scholars whose studies are gathered in the present volume also exhibit a child-like passion for the mythical beasts. They chase after them and enjoy their enriching company. And even if in childhood they communed at home with dogs, cats, and hamsters,

instead of Hippogriffs, they participated in the life-cycle of the creatures from mythology through the phenomenon of reception – in art, literature, and their family’s storytelling.

Research into the fantastic beasts (which boasts a special name: *monster studies* or *teratology*, from the Greek word *τέρας*, ‘sign’, ‘wonder’, ‘portent’) is truly multidisciplinary and requires the collaborative effort of a team. For you need the skills of ancient literature scholars and archaeologists to be able to read the sources where the most ancient trails of the mythical monsters are preserved. You need the competences of philosophers and psychologists to understand the ontology of these beings and the processes that take place in the human mind in reaction to encounters with the Other. The specialists in modern languages and art will help you chase the beasts in later epochs. In this research it is also crucially important to involve experts in children’s and young adults’ culture, including its popular stream, for the mythical creatures have developed a peculiar liking for this field and so have indwelled it. Nor should a certain understanding of cryptozoology and magiozoology as a reception space be scorned, either. After all, as the enthusiasts of these branches repeat, what would you believe to be real, had you no prior knowledge of these creatures: a horse with a horn on its forehead – that is, a unicorn, or a combination of a leopard and a camel with a two-metre-long neck and charming eyelashes – that is, a giraffe?

Furthermore, it needs to be emphasized that even the most rational of scholars are not immune to the irresistible fascination the mythical creatures are able to evoke all over the globe. The pioneer of modern science, that naturalist and explorer, Alexander von Humboldt, the man who measured the world and invented Nature – to paraphrase the titles of the two famous books on Humboldt’s life by Daniel Kehlmann (*Die Vermessung der Welt*, 2005) and Andrea Wulf (*The Invention of Nature*, 2015) – sent to his elder brother Wilhelm (a great philosopher of language and reformer of education) the following words from his stay in Puerto Orotava on June 20, 1799:

The nights were magnificent; in this clear, tranquil atmosphere it was quite possible to read the sextant in the brilliant moonlight, and then the southern constellations, Lupus and the Centaur! What splendid nights!¹

Rather than in the ancient classical beasts, Humboldt was interested in the not-yet-discovered creatures of the New World. Indeed, he encountered and classified a number of them, and with both admirable personal engagement (e.g., he let some kinds of mosquitos feed on him) and artistic talent (he captured them in his own remarkable drawings, recently edited by Sarah Bärtschi, cf. Humboldt

¹ “Die Nächte waren prächtig: eine Mondhelle in diesem reinen milden Himmel, dass man auf dem Sextanten lesen konnte; und die südlichen Gestirne, der Zentaur und Wolf! Welche Nacht!” (Humboldt 1880, 7). English trans. from Löwenberg, Avé-Lallemant, and Dove (1873, 260).

2019). However, as his writings attest, in that chase after the beasts of *terrae incognitae* (some of them mythical, too), he never lost the proclivity to notice beings he remembered from his childhood lessons in Greek mythology.

The Humboldt brothers, in accord with their high social position, received a careful education, beginning with Latin and Greek and the study of the sources passed down in these languages. Alexander's case proves that childhood and the classics offer a haven you can always come back to when you are in need of understanding, irrespective of the *modus vivendi* you choose. In his travels to the end of the world Humboldt ever kept in mind both the scientific and artistic legacy of the past that helped him handle his present experiences and look to the future with hope. He also followed the Ancient Greeks in giving the world a name: "cosmos", which – as we shall soon see – is crucial for the concept of monstrosity, too.

As philosophers note, the very idea of naming not the single plant or animal, but the world as such – this was revolutionary (cf. Brague 1999). For the first time we find the word "cosmos" in (no surprise here) Homer's *Iliad* (cf., e.g., 4.145, 10.472, 10.622; also *Odyssey* 3.138, 8.489). We find it also in Plato's *Timaeus* 29a: καλός ἐστιν ὃδε ὁ κόσμος – "the world is beautiful". This is one of the first phrases that are taught during Ancient Greek lessons and it gives a precious insight into the minds of our ancestors. Indeed, not without reason did Plato use the adjective "beautiful" here. The "cosmos" means order, something that is arranged – in opposition to the monstrous chaos. It denotes a harmonious system and Humboldt reintroduced this term to the modern vocabulary in his treatise *Kosmos – Entwurf einer physischen Weltbeschreibung* [Cosmos: A Sketch of a Physical Description of the Universe], in which he presented his holistic vision.² For this polymath's observations from his travels evolved in his mind into a general idea of the existence of "the mysterious connection of all [...] matter" (Klencke and Schlesier 1853, 157). The community born out of Humboldt's reflection included people (he was an ardent enemy of slavery), animals, plants, inanimate nature, and – rather unexpectedly – the mythical beasts, like Cheiron, who accompanied him beyond the Pillars of Hercules in the form of the constellation he described to his brother earlier, during his stop in Tenerife.

In fact, the creatures from mythology are closer than we think and their existence in culture is necessary for the cosmos to be true and complete. We may not easily notice them any longer, but they gaze upon us from the night sky, they hide in books and Hollywood blockbusters, in the childhood tales told by our family members and in the Internet. They dwell in ancient ruins and city parks,

² Vols. I–V (1845–1862). Humboldt owed much in his vision to Goethe (cf. Rupke 2005, 71). Here I include some of my reflections I had the honour to present at the Humboldt Anniversary Alumni Conference *Humboldt heute. Netzwerk fördern. Zukunft gestalten* in June 2019 in Berlin.

and they inhabit our souls and hearts. Humboldt experienced various aspects of their force, from the comforting beauty of the wise Centaur among the stars to the constant anxiety that did not permit him to rest and cherish this beauty for a longer period, but rather placed before him the ever new adventures that beckoned him “with a siren’s voice” (Gendron 1961, 154). The Sirens and other mythical beasts also beckoned the authors of the chapters in the present volume, and now they beckon you, our Reader, which is why you are here to embark on this journey. We will travel together to encounter, know better, and maybe even understand somewhat both monsters and ourselves.

Monster Theory

Alexander von Humboldt as a polymath enjoys the fame of being the last human able to embrace with his mind the whole of contemporary knowledge (Bednarek 2017). All the more so should it be emphasized that he nonetheless called his treatise on the world an *Entwurf* – a sketch, thus displaying a high degree of modesty and offering a model of research, the future of which, as he believed with his amazing foresight, was to reside in team projects. While the present volume results from a shared adventure of scholars hailing from different backgrounds (the classics, archaeology, anthropology, ethnography, media studies, modern languages) as well as from various parts of the world, and thereby attempts at putting Humboldt’s reflection into practice, we wish to stress that our team effort still remains within the *Entwurf*-sketch concept. We have analyzed but a fraction of the theme, in the humble hope to offer some food for thought and encourage other researchers to soon join in and develop studies on the mythical monsters and their reception.

Indeed, the needs are great, and they begin with having to define what a monster, a beast, a creature is. One of the pioneers in the field, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen – the author of the seminal “Monster Culture (Seven Theses)” and the editor of the collection *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (1996) – not without reason accentuates the “ontological liminality” of the Other that escapes easy categorizations. In fact, all the endeavours to cram our monsters into a simple taxonomy have proven futile, regardless of the approaches used (and they began already back in the times of Aristotle, and include a whole range of medieval bestaries). Igor Baglioni, in his highly interesting monograph *Echidna e i suoi discendenti: studio sulle entità mostruose della Teogonia Esiodea* (2017), chooses as his reference point the chief Greek terms, such as:³ τέρας (creatures existing against the cosmic order and Zeus’ will), κῆτος (sea monsters), θήρ (the beasts from Artemis’ kingdom), πέλωρ (related to τέρας, but standing out due to their huge and terrible appearance). The scholar determines the strong and weak points of such a categorization and demonstrates at the same time how complex

³ For convenience, I give these terms in their basic form of *Nominativus singularis*.

the issue is even in regard to Classical Antiquity – for none of these Greek terms is the exact equivalent of the Latin *monstrum* (13–21), so popular in the modern languages rooted in the Mediterranean Basin.

If not by means of linguistic taxonomy, a certain order in monster studies can be introduced through tracing the origin of the creatures. Baglioni divides them into primordial, eschatological, and sent by the gods as signs (25). The attempts to create a monster classification can also be based on the purely visual (not to say: empirical) experience. This approach is eagerly chosen by the popularizers of cultural heritage, as it offers great opportunities for collaboration with artists who create the creatures' portraits. The Polish writer Bartłomiej Grzegorz Sala, in his elaboration *Mitologia grecka. Leksykon bestii i potworów* [Greek Mythology: A Lexicon of Beasts and Monsters, 2018], illustrated by the famous graphic Błażej Ostoja Lniski,⁴ follows precisely this trail by also developing the reflections of Poland's greatest lexicographer and encyclopaedist, Władysław Kopaliński (1907–2007), whose life mission was to help society, both its young and more mature members, understand the world through the signs of culture.⁵ And mythical beasts are undoubtedly such signs. Kopaliński (2003, 1019) distinguished two kinds of human-like creatures (characterized by enormous size, e.g., the Giants, or by excess/lack of a feature, e.g., the Cyclops) and two genres of hybrids (human-animal, like the centaurs; and animalesque, as in the case of Cerberus). Sala adds the bodiless (immaterial) creatures to the list (e.g., ghosts) and he praises the imagination of the Greeks who populated our culture with monsters so efficiently that we have been under their charm for nearly three millennia (2018, 6).

The fact that after such a long time of communing with the mythical beasts we are still full of doubts as to who they are and how to treat them, is the best testimony to their importance in our life and the challenges awaiting researchers in this field. Nor has the wizarding world managed to deal with this issue. The ardent debate on the difference between “a being” and “a beast”, reported also in the Muggle edition of Scamander's handbook (Rowling 2009, XIX–XX), offered no clear resolution. The participants in the discussions at the Ministry of Magic, exactly like the Muggles, referred *inter alia* to the argument known to us from Aristotle's writings (*Politics* 1253a) – the one of the ability to speak as the marker of “being a being”. Yet this proved to be invalid, especially in regard to the creatures who, like centaurs in the Harry Potter series, were able to communicate through speech, via both their own and human tongue, yet nevertheless refused any kind of integration. This case shows that even writers bear no illusion that the theme can be dealt with quickly and easily, if only in a fantasy realm. Maybe

⁴ The head of the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts' Studio of Book Design and Illustrations, we have the pleasure to collaborate with.

⁵ It is worth adding that Kopaliński coined the term “teenager” in Polish: “nastolatek”.

this is because they are sadly aware of all the ramifications the problem of Otherness has in the mundane world.

Noteworthy here is also that the main source of knowledge today, Wikipedia (let's not be afraid of it, as it reflects global consciousness like nothing else), is rather cautious and proposes a very broad definition in relation to the creatures from classical mythology, such as Medusa and the Minotaur. The adverb "often" used in this definition serves as its further delimitator: "A monster is often a type of creature that is considered grotesque" (*s.v.* "Monster"). Quite remarkable that the English edition resorts to a French term here, and even if this term is not perceived as foreign anymore, it was an "Other", when it entered into English in the sixteenth century (cf. Kanz 2015). Aptly enough, Wikipedia's explication of "grotesque" (full of contradictory notions: "a general adjective for the strange, mysterious, magnificent, fantastic, hideous, ugly, incongruous, unpleasant, or disgusting") only adds to the level of complexity of the problem.

It is worth following this trail and focusing on the term "monster" that Wikipedia associates with mythical beasts in the first place. If we check its denotation in the Internet Merriam-Webster Dictionary, we can find some negative meanings, both in reference to external traits of a human (!) being ("a person of unnatural or extreme ugliness, deformity") and inner ones ("deviat[ing] from normal or acceptable behavior or character", "wickedness, or cruelty"). But at the same time it also means "highly successful" ("That movie was a *monster* at the box office") – a similar shift in connotation as in the expression "terribly happy" (with "terribly" in the meaning of "very", cf. Higgleton, Sargeant, and Seaton 2006, 935). Such juxtapositions seem oxymoronic – however, precisely for this reason they perfectly reflect the essence of monstrosity, which is also the essence of being an Other.

The Latin etymology of the monster, for which Baglioni did not find any suitable equivalent in Greek, may help us get nearer to this essence. While the noun "monstrum" is easily linked with the verb "monstrare" (i.e. to show something, to make it visible), its root is rather in "monere", which means to warn, to instruct, and to advise (Staley 2010, [n.p.]; Burch 2002, 89; Lawrence 2015). And this is exactly what the mythical beasts do with us. Their peculiar ability results from the fact that they challenge our habits and disrupt harmony – as if they were storming the perfect cosmos where we otherwise feel safe in an environment familiar to us (cf. also Baglioni 2017, 13). That is why Horace, in his famous *carmen* 37 from book 1 of the *Odes*, "Nunc est bibendum", on the victory of Actium, defines Cleopatra as "fatale monstrum". Her sole existence – a woman-ruler trespassing the traditional Roman axiological and social norms – was simply "incompatible" with the mentality of Italy's inhabitants. The monster-slayer, the future Augustus in person, had to rush into action:

[Caesar = Octavian] accipiter velut
 mollis columbas aut leporem citus
 venator in campis nivalis
 Haemoniae, daret ut catenis

fatale monstrum, quae generosius
 perire quaerens nec muliebriter
 expavit ensem, nec latentis
 classe cita reparavit oras.

[Caesar = Octavian] like a hawk
 [hunts] tender doves or a swift hunter
 [hunts] a hare on the plains of
 snowy Thessaly, to put in chains

that deadly monster, who, wanting
 to die more nobly, did not have a
 feminine dread of the sword, nor find
 hiding shores with her swift fleet.⁶

Horace (*nomen omen*) de-monstrates Cleopatra's monstrosity also by committing an audacious "crime" against Latin grammar (impossible to be rendered in English translation, see italics): he combines the *genus neutrum* of "fatale monstrum" with the relative pronoun of the feminine gender, "quae". Indeed, the Roman poet needs to break all the rules, also those of language, to describe the Queen of Egypt's terrifying and fascinating Otherness.

But not only Cleopatra was (or was assumed to be) a monster. A seed of monstrosity, in the best and worst meaning of this term, seems to lie hidden within the human species as such. *You, monster!* – we say sometimes even to our kin (both seriously and in jokes). Sophocles counts us among τὰ δεινὰ, the things or creatures that are terrible (let's recall "terribly happy" twenty-five centuries later). In *Antigone* 332–333 we hear the chorus sing: πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ κούδὲν / ἀνθρώπου δεινότερον πέλει ("Numberless are the world's wonders, but none / More wonderful than man"⁷). For centuries these words were considered a manifesto of optimism, but today we know that they are also disturbing for they equally highlight the dangerous power of the human being – a wonder indeed, one that can both save and destroy the cosmos.

In view of this it is hardly surprising that the mythical creatures put us off balance. The difficulty in defining them is only one of the symptoms of their power to warn us (even if from ourselves), to instruct, to advise, and to make us, indeed, wonder who we really are. For they do not disrupt harmony, as the true

⁶ Literary English translation from Wikisource, s.v. "Translation: Odes (Horace)/Book I/37".

⁷ Translation by Dudley Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald (Sophocles 1977, 203–204).

harmony – which Humboldt himself discovered during his adventures – is only where chaos has its place, too.

So much for theory. How about the practical monster studies?

Monster University

The Minotaur is – next to Medusa – the most famous creature of Classical Antiquity, the epitome of the monster, as one may venture to state. Thus, it is also reasonable to take our first steps with him.⁸ Matt Kaplan, in *The Science of Monsters: The Origins of the Creatures We Love to Fear*, finds the trails of the Minotaur even on the mining vessel *Nostramo* in Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979), where the crew is confined in a labyrinthine construction and chased and devoured by a terrible beast (Kaplan 2012, x). Yet, in Schnell's movie, Mia, with her childish inquisitiveness, manages to look right through the monster mask of her drug-addicted brother and see a victim begging for her help. So what is the common image of the Minotaur? The answer to this question ("bestia", if we let Dante speak, *Inferno* 12) is simple only at first sight. For already in ancient times did the sensitivity of artists show the Cretan creature from an unexpected angle.⁹ The Vulci red-figure kylix from the fourth century BC displays an original scene: Queen Pasiphaë nurses a baby Minotaur, she handles him (it would be impossible to use the pronoun "it" here) gently, she strokes his head, while the beast we know from the common version of the myth as wild and dreadful, repays her with similar kindness (cf. Fig. 1, on the next page).¹⁰

If we look closer at the masterpieces for young people, we will notice that not just a few of their authors propose approaches full of empathy, too. For instance, the father of mythological elaborations for the English-speaking world, Nathaniel Hawthorne, in *Tanglewood Tales* (1853),¹¹ boldly reverses the perspective.

⁸ See also the analyses in Part 1 of the present volume, *In the Maze of Youth: Meeting the Minotaur*.

⁹ Even Dante's Minotaur, the bloodthirsty beast, encourages a number of none-too-obvious interpretations. For instance, Kathryn Ann Lindskoog (1997, 88, n. 3) sees in this creature and its image by William Blake the source of inspiration for Maurice Sendak's monsters from his children's literature bestseller *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963). On this book see also below.

¹⁰ A completely different, horrifying yet fascinating at the same time, vision of the baby-Minotaur is offered by Madeline Miller in her novel *Circe* (2018).

¹¹ In fact, I would venture to state that due to the translations of Hawthorne's book into other languages, he was the father of mythological narration for the youngest in many parts of the world (e.g., the first Polish edition was in 1973 and Hawthorne's myths – as a collection or in separated units – are still being republished).



Fig. 1: Pasiphaë nursing the Minotaur, red-figure kylix, ca. 340–320 BC, Louvre Museum, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, No. inv. 1066, Wikimedia Commons.

While he introduces the Minotaur as “a certain dreadful monster” (Hawthorne 1970, 228), he soon makes us hear – and understand – his (again not “its”!) voice, “some sort of sound like the human voice” (239), lamenting his fate.¹² Indeed, the monster is closed in the Labyrinth completely alone, and though Theseus feels a deep repulsion towards this half man, half bull, he cannot “but be sensible of some sort of pity” (240). The hero is also aware that the Minotaur is a helpless tool in the hands of King Minos, whom he defines as “a more hideous monster than the Minotaur himself” (235). The narrator adds at this point that the readers will meet many similar “Minotaurs” in the future, precisely among people who may change into monsters if they permit Evil get into their nature (240).¹³

Hawthorne’s exquisite open-mindedness inspired many generations of children’s authors, and so we can enjoy today such remote echoes of his original creations as the Minotaur-like creatures in *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963) by Maurice Sendak. The readers of the present volume will find further examples in the following chapters. Meanwhile, it is worth observing that the imagination of artists (inspired by the artworks from subsequent epochs and nurtured by the

¹² On the ability to speak as the distinguishing feature of human beings see, e.g., above, Aristotle (*Politics* 1253a), and Cicero (*De inventione* 1.1–4).

¹³ On this motif see in particular Sheila Murnaghan with Deborah H. Roberts’ chapter “«A Kind of Minotaur»: Literal and Spiritual Monstrosity in the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne”, 55–74.

memories of early readings, including the ancient sources studied at various stages of education) makes both the all-ages and adult stream of culture become a hospitable environment for the a-monstrous incarnations of the Minotaur – and all over the world, to mention only the disturbing painting *The Minotaur* (1885) by George Frederick Watts (cf. Fig. 2), Jorge Borges' well-known short story "The House of Asterion" (1947), The Jim Henson Company's unusual *Storyteller: Greek Myths* (1990), and Zbigniew Herbert's poetic prose "Historia Minotaura" [The History of the Minotaur, 1974], in which the most famous Polish classicist interprets the myth of Pasiphaë's son as a story of a disabled boy, rejected by his family.



Fig. 2: George Frederick Watts, *The Minotaur* (1885), Tate Britain, Wikimedia Commons.

This ultra-concise overview of the Minotaur's (*nomen omen*) thread shows the huge potential of research, and children's and young adults' culture is especially promising in this respect. Cohen, who declares that "monsters are our children" who implore of us an answer to the question "why did we create them?" (20), touches a very important aspect of teratological studies with his remark. Indeed, Aristotle himself states that "he who does not resemble his parents is already in a certain sense a monstrosity" (*Generation of Animals* 4.3.769b 4–10; trans. A. L. Payne, from Long 2012, 197; cf. also Bearden 2019, 10; and Aristotle 1943). The ancient philosopher thus refers to the cycle of Nature, with the sterile eye of a scientist who describes certain processes, and in fact the meaning of this passage is more complex when read in Greek original, with his emphasis on the search for the causes of various phenomena. However, if we delve deeply into

the core of such an interpretation, it will strike us that at the same time these words, when applied to sentient beings, constitute one of the most cruel definitions of Otherness ever.

The motif of a monster-child who is a shame to his father¹⁴ revives in the modern era with the Modern Prometheus, for this is how Mary Shelley (1818) calls Dr. Victor Frankenstein, the creator of the monster *par excellence*, now a cultural icon. The success of the novel is indeed huge, as the Creature responds to the human predilection for a thrill (*Homo* not only *ludens*, according to Johan Huizinga, 1938, but *timens*, as well). However, there is more to it than that. Eileen Hunt Botting, in her monograph *Mary Shelley and the Rights of the Child: Political Philosophy in «Frankenstein»*, puts into focus the monster's sympathetic character: "despite his crimes", we pity the Creature, "abandoned by family, abused by society" (2018, xi). While *Frankenstein* is not a story for children (only in theory, of course¹⁵), it is a children's story, for it talks about how the one who is only at the beginning of his voyage of discovery in the world and building his own identity, yearns to belong and be accepted, with all his hopes and the illusions that life verifies. That is also why this Creature is such a good and fascinating partner to think with – about Otherness, Community, love, and rejection.

The shared reflection with a monster, as Victor's case attests, turns out to be crucial also for the mature (at least in terms of age) protagonist. The Doctor's failure only highlights its importance. The constant readiness to change, we know in theory from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (full of mythical creatures, too) and in practice from Alexander von Humboldt's life, the willingness to broaden horizons and to challenge stereotypes is a privilege that the monsters help us achieve, often accompanied also by the animals, without whom "there would be no human civilization" (Largo 2013, xiv). Nowadays, just as the animals, up from a subordinated position, ever more often become our teachers,¹⁶ so do monsters build their own university we can enroll in. To quote Cassandra Eason in *Fabulous Creatures, Mythical Monsters, and Animal Power Symbols: A Handbook* – they "represent, in a pure and undiluted form, strengths and qualities that humans desire in their own lives" (2008, VIII). Thus the deprecating remark (transmitted by Aristotle) on monstrosity as a form of Otherness

¹⁴ Again, see Dante, *Inferno* 12, the Minotaur as "infamia di Creti". See also Anthony Minghella's version of the Minotaur's myth in *Storyteller: Greek Myths* for The Jim Henson Company (1990) – for details see my chapter *Chasing Mythical Muppets: Classical Antiquity according to Jim Henson*, 557–600.

¹⁵ Children's culture hosts many incarnations of Dr. Frankenstein's Creature and his descendants, e.g., the female character Frankie Stein in the animated series *Monster High*.

¹⁶ See also the reflections within the relatively new field of Human-Animal Studies, e.g., Korhonen and Ruonakoski 2017; Henderson 2013, xiii. On the new directions in the Humanities see, e.g., Jonsson 2019.

paradoxically turns out to be the source of the monsters' power: for at one and the same time they resemble humans and are also completely different, and transform with the development of the culture that is involved in their reception. If we follow and observe them without any sort of prejudice, we can learn to look at the world, the cosmos, from a diverse perspective – one we might have long forgotten or never discovered. Zoe Jaques, who analyzes Percy Jackson's monster characters on the backdrop of Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto*, quotes her observation on the significance of the Graeco-Roman lessons with the mythical creatures for the evolution of human mentality:

Monsters have always defined the limits of community in Western imaginations. The Centaurs and Amazons of ancient Greece established the limits of the centered polis of the Greek male human by their disruption of marriage and boundary pollutions of the warrior with animality and woman. (Haraway 2016, 64–65; cf. Jaques 2015, 167)

This thread is taken up by Liz Gloyn in her monograph *Tracking Classical Monsters in Popular Culture* (2019).¹⁷ As the scholar shows through an analysis of selected case studies, this particular ability of the mythical beasts is still valid – after thousands of years of their cultural existence – and it is what makes us marvel at their strength: “[...] they tell us what it is to be human. We define ourselves against their monstrosity, and ask whether they remain as monstrous as they once were” (11). Gloyn sees in monster studies a powerful tool by which to “gain a better understanding of what popular culture makes of Antiquity, and how the continued dialogue between the past and the present flourishes in all areas of society” (5).

The mythical beasts in children's and young adults' culture have also an additional task. Owing to the ever new artists who give them ever new lives by “filtering” the past through the challenges of the present times, the ancient monsters introduce the youngest generations into the heritage of Classical Antiquity and at the same time prepare their wards for the “here and now”. Thus, research into the reception of creatures from Greek and Roman mythology may reveal a spectrum of tensions within contemporary society that are often untraceable in the “adult” stream of culture, which is seemingly mature, tamed, and under control.

Upon this canvas I wish to propose a definition of what a (classical) monster is by drawing on the famous exchange of ideas beyond the centuries between Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, T. S. Eliot, and J. M. Coetzee on “what a classic is” (cf. Marciniak 2016a, 10). Like all the classics, so the mythical beasts have their roots deep in the past, from which they transmit the universal questions that knock us out of balance and lead us out of our comfort zone. Thus, they make us

¹⁷ I wish to thank Liz Gloyn for making her book available to me before its publication – hence I could quote it in this introduction.

take a step forward in understanding our identity a bit better, which is vital if we wish to maintain a substantial degree of agency in the future. For the adulthood is not free of monsters, either, as already Hawthorne warned his readers. Such monsters often come in disguise and deprive their victims of freedom, both in physical and mental terms. The mythical beasts, who are familiar to us from childhood, may offer a kind of asylum for the humans traumatized by the nightmares of their life, like in the case of Mia's brother (too quickly grown-up after the father's death), when the ancient myth of the Minotaur provided the shattered family with a chance of salvation.

The range of works analyzed in the present volume will show that Schnell's movie is not an isolated example. On the contrary, the all-ages culture that flourishes in our times is particularly accommodating for the mythical creatures also after the phase of childhood is long gone. Referring to Haraway's seminal term "companion species" (2008) and Monica Flegel's "companion animals" (2015, 2) in regard to our "lesser brothers", we can even call the ancient beasts our "companion monsters". Owing to the phenomenon of the reception, we know them from our early readings, from the tales by our parents or guardians, from school lessons, visits to the museums, and our first experiences of the power of art, the works of popular culture included. Even if indeed they lead us out of our comfort zone at a certain point, they do so to give us comfort when we need it most. They are a reassuring component of our cosmos, like the Centaur looking at Alexander von Humboldt from the night sky on his adventure towards the Unknown.

Chasing Mythical Beasts with Alexander von Humboldt

The present volume sums up the results of the project *Chasing Mythical Beasts... The Reception of Creatures from Graeco-Roman Mythology in Children's and Young Adults' Culture as a Transformation Marker* (*Auf der Spur von mythischen Bestien... Die Rezeption von Kreaturen aus der griechisch-römischen Mythologie in der Kinder- und Jugendkultur als Transformationsmarker*), aimed at exploring the reception of the mythical creatures in the evolving youth culture, including their potential to serve as a marker of societal transformations throughout the ages, especially in regard to the shifting border of what it means to be human.

The project was supported by the Humboldt Alumni Award for Innovative Networking Initiatives given by the German Alexander von Humboldt Foundation to its Alumni of all disciplines the world over, in order to promote pioneering formats for multilateral academic cooperation and to enhance understanding between individual countries or cultures (Marciniak 2016a, 24 and 2016b; cf. also Alexander von Humboldt Foundation [n.d.]). The Award, assigned for the years 2014–2017, made it possible to develop the research initiated in 2012–2013 within the Loeb Classical Library Foundation Grant for

the project *Our Mythical Childhood... The Classics and Children's Literature Between East and West* – an experimental endeavour to carry out a reconnaissance of the reception of Classical Antiquity in the literature for young readers in various parts of the globe.¹⁸ The major novelty of that first project, which immediately showed its huge research potential and transformed into the whole programme of a multiannual perspective, *Our Mythical Childhood*, consisted in the inclusion of regional contexts into the scope of studies on the reception of the classical tradition. Within this approach, we did not limit ourselves to the places usually associated with a more or less direct influence of Mediterranean civilization, but we started exploring the grounds far beyond the *limes* of the Imperium Romanum, ones that for many years had been considered as parochial and hardly relevant for the Greek and Roman classics in the context of children's and young adults' cultural stream.¹⁹ Today, the necessity to include these parts of the world into research becomes all the more pressing, as the globalization of culture unexpectedly favours Classical Antiquity, for it gives new lives to the past through a dynamic reinterpretation of the ancient heritage via various regional optics, with the Internet and new media enabling quick exchange of the information and artworks, and thus fostering further stages of this reinterpretation process. Moreover, as classical reception serves also as a mirror of social, ideological, and cultural transformations, this approach permits us to gain a deeper understanding and a comparative insight into such phenomena that are underway at various locations and on a worldwide scale.

So our team of scholars from the United States, through Cameroon and a number of European countries, to Australia and New Zealand, departed on a purely ecological chase after chosen creatures and monsters from classical mythology to analyze their reception and to look through this lens at the changes in human sensitivity and the metamorphoses of the concept of monstrosity itself. This stage of the *Our Mythical Childhood* programme also meant for us the first significant step in broadening our research scope to include not only literature, but also other spheres of human artistic activity, mainly movies, TV-series, and comics, for the culture targeted at young people is strongly linked to the visual arts, and the mythical beasts have particular potential to inspire artists to create appealing images of them.

The results of our chase were discussed in May 12–15, 2016, during an international conference at the Centre for Studies on the Classical Tradition (OBTA) of the Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw, and this exchange of

¹⁸ See my introduction on the project's website (archive): <<http://mythicalbeasts.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/>>.

¹⁹ This regional approach in the “adult” reception studies was conceptualized and put into practice by Jerzy Axer within the Centre for Studies on the Classical Tradition (OBTA) he founded at the University of Warsaw in 1991. Now OBTA is one of five permanent units of the Faculty of “Artes Liberales” UW.

ideas helped us to reflect on our research, while preparing this volume for publication. During the conference, we also enjoyed an inspiring exhibition in the University of Warsaw's Gallery. The photographer Tomasz Łaptaszyński showed his pictures of interesting reception cases collected in the Polish province, thus attesting to the presence of the classics in the people's everyday life and the fittingness of the regional approach. The artists from the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw exhibited their illustrations prepared under the tutorship by Jan Rusiński and his colleagues, to whom we owe the possibility to continue our collaboration initiated in 2012 with the late Prof. Zygmunt Januszewski.²⁰ One of the artworks created in this first period – *Cerberus* by Maja Abgarowicz – can be seen on the cover of the present volume.

Of course it is impossible to gather all the mythical beasts in the asylum of a single book. Neither Aristotle in all his writings on nature nor the authors of the multi-volumed medieval bestiaries managed to get any closer to the completion of such a task. The chase goes on and contemporary culture offers us ever new impulses for a constant re-thinking of the idea of monstrosity and the role of the monsters in our lives. Furthermore, there are some creatures previously dismissed or unnoticed that now enter into the field of vision of the artists and make us look at the whole issue from yet another different angle. In sum, the prospects for the ancient beasts are good: the growing number of publications on their origin, habits, and reception attests that the theme is attractive to ever more scholars who decide to follow the trails of their favourite creatures. Ours is but a humble attempt at casting a bit of light on the presence of the mythical beasts in the culture for young people – a ground as much fascinating as it is difficult, for coming back to childhood now, inevitably we face our own dreams, some of which came true and some of which were crushed, yet may still come true in the future. With a little help from our companion monsters.

Alexander von Humboldt is a perfect patron for such expeditions, not because he makes us sadly aware in his writings that we will never be able to measure the world, the realm of the mythical beasts included, but because he demonstrates with optimism that all the value and joy is in trying all the same.

Overview of the Volume's Content

The creatures from Greek and Roman mythology have penetrated children's and young adults' culture to such a degree that they spin clear of any coherent classification. Thus, the readers of this volume will meet them in various time spans. We focus mainly on contemporary works, but it would be absurd to draw a sharp line between certain periods, as the monsters cross all the borders easily, supported by the unlimited imagination of the artists. Also, the readers will look with us at various age target groups, with this reservation that nowadays such a

²⁰ See a reportage from the exhibition by Dorota Łagodzka (2016).

classification seems ever more obsolete, with children and adults enjoying the same works, like the ancient public of an aoidos. And we will guide the readers across many genres – after all, the mythical beasts are conquering the new media without abandoning their old nesting areas.

We start as “classically” as possible, by offering Part 1 of the volume, *In the Maze of Youth: Meeting the Minotaur*, as a tribute to the most famous monster of Greek mythology. Yet its or his image as it emerges from our analyses is far from traditional, even in the works properly regarded as classical. Sheila Murnaghan and Deborah H. Roberts dedicate two chapters to the Minotaur. First, they take us through the Labyrinth created by Nathaniel Hawthorne, one of the first advocates of the Minotaur in youth culture. As early as in the mid-nineteenth century Hawthorne seems to challenge the soon-to-be stereotypical image of children’s literature as conservative and he proposes a truly revolutionary interpretation of the ancient myth in terms of sensibility and empathy towards the beast and its (or rather his) disturbing dual nature. (The legacy of this approach is a haven for later works, as Schnell’s *Mia and the Minotaur* demonstrates.) Next, the scholars discuss the concept of duality in the creature in picture books, thus offering a stimulating comparison between the narrative component and its visualization. Liz Gloyn moves with the Minotaur to the field of literature for slightly older readers than Hawthorne’s public and she analyzes the beasts’ original incarnations in contemporary British fiction for young adults. Markus Janka and Michael Stierstorfer perform a daring juxtaposition of ancient sources (Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in the lead) with recent blockbusters, both in the international (*Percy Jackson* by Rick Riordan, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins) and local (*Irrfahrer* by Gerd Scherm) context, and point out, that the myth of the Minotaur is hybridized in a typical postmodern way. Przemysław Kordos proposes a comparative approach of a different kind – he analyzes the picture of the Minotaur in the creature’s “motherland”, in (Modern) Greece, along with the images of two other sinister monsters – Hydra and Cerberus. The last chapter in this section is offered by Elizabeth Hale who explores a powerful multimedia picture book, *Requiem for a Beast* by the Australian Matt Ottley. She shows how the creature from Crete, brought to the new continent by European colonizers as part of their cultural framework, finds itself in the Australian interior and becomes a guide for a young protagonist who faces the unbearable burden of his ancestors’ guilt over the Aboriginal Australians’ suffering. This Minotaur serves as an intermediary to process individual and local experiences into a universal communication code, making these experiences understandable in other parts of the world.

In the contest for the first place at the podium of “mythological celebrities” the Minotaur has a strong competitor – Medusa, one of the most ancient (Hesiod) or youngest (Ovid) creatures. Thus the opening chapters of Part 2 of the volume – *Eye to Eye with Medusa & Co.: Facing the Female Monsters* – are dedicated to her. Next, she cedes place to two kinds of creatures of the same gender: Erinyes,

hardly popular among youth, and the Sirens, equally or even more famous than the Gorgon and the Minotaur. The authors of the chapters in this section give voice to the beings whose laughter, concealing millennia of pain, rejection, and hope, was for the first time heard seriously by H  l  ne Cixous (1976). Susan Deacy, taking as her motto Cohen’s thought of the “monsters as our children”, explores the difficult relationship between the two female beings: Athena and Medusa according to the British writer Richard Woff, with the goddess as both co-responsible for the Gorgon’s tragedy and a catalyst of “girl power”. Owen Hodkinson, on the example of the two popular novels for teens (*Goddess Girls: Medusa the Mean* by Joan Holub and Suzanne Williams and *Being Me(dusa): And Other Things that Suck* by A. Lynn Powers), offers an insight into the concept of the creature’s monstrosity as a substitute for real-world issues that can make a girl stigmatized by her peers. Babette Puetz focuses on the monsters whose sole name made the Greeks’ blood run cold – the Erinyes. Rather avoided by the artists of later epochs and rarely present in contemporary youth culture,²¹ they get new lives in Philip Pullman’s *Amber Spyglass* – the third volume of his unprecedented trilogy – with ancient Greek drama influences analyzed in the chapter. The last two texts of Part 2 offer readers the opportunities to meet the Sirens. First, Weronika Kostecka and Maciej Skowera discuss the Polish contemporary novel by Anna Czerwińska-Rydel – *Bałycka syrena* [The Baltic Siren] – a biography for children of a singer and musician from Gdańsk, Constantia Zierenberg (1605–1653), whose exceptional talent and striving for agency against society’s expectations in regard to a young woman, marked her as a kind of monster. The scholars juxtapose the concepts of womanhood and monstrosity by taking into consideration two aspects: the peculiarity of Constantia’s life as such and Czerwińska-Rydel’s ability to transform the biographical material into a fascinating and inspiring story for a young public. Last but not least, Katarzyna Jerzak undertakes the challenge of coming back to a classic *par excellence* of children’s literature – J. M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan*. In particular, she focuses on the motif of the Mermaids’ Lagoon to demonstrate how important it is – especially in the case of the famous books that are a base for spin-offs or adaptations often remote from the original – to keep the memory of the origins of myth.

Peter Pan makes an appearance also in the first chapter from Part 3, *Horned and Hoofed: Riding into Adulthood*, where the liminal creatures of different kinds of equine component are studied. Bettina K  mmerling-Meibauer opens the analyses by exploring the trails of one of the most mysterious deities of Greek mythology, Pan, in Barrie’s novel. Next, Edith Hall discusses the reception of a

²¹ Yet when they do appear, their impact is always breathtaking, as in one of the recent reinterpretations of the Erinyes mythos in contemporary literature – *The Amber Fury* by Natalie Haynes (2014). They are also present, for instance, on Ancient Greek vases and in academic painting.

creature particularly important for youth culture – Cheiron the educator. The good centaur – in spite (or exactly because) of his liminal nature, a human-animal hybrid, since mythical times has been responsible for the acculturation of his little wards – the future heroes of the classical mythology. Today's children know him mainly from such bestsellers as the Percy Jackson and Harry Potter series (here as Firenze), yet, as Edith Hall makes us aware, he stands firmly on his hooves in educational literature both of ancient and modern times. The motif of Cheiron's wisdom reached even far Russia – a reception case studied by Elena Ermolaeva who presents how the myth of this creature evolved in connection with folklore and biblical tradition. From Russia we move to Poland, into the times of the People's Republic, where Karoline Thaidigsmann follows an original incarnation of Pegasus, accompanied by less classical (nonetheless still quite ancient) monsters – a mysterious crocodile Cyryl, an army of huge spiders, and a tyrant in crisis. All these beings contribute to constructing the double address technique by the authors: the creatures' surreal form and behaviour are a source of entertainment for young readers, while the adult public finds in their figures some encrypted allusions to the totalitarian regime, from its growth, through blossom, to degeneration and decay. The last chapter in this section again establishes a link with the next part. Simon J. G. Burton takes up the motif of Pegasus and he also tracks down talking horses and unicorns in the series that simply cannot be absent from any study on the reception of Classical Antiquity in youth culture – mainly, C. S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*, where the mythological heritage works together with Christian tradition.

The Part 4 – *Mythical Creatures across Time and Space: Negotiating the Bestiary* – gathers the chapters that offer food for thought on the concept of monstrosity itself. Here also some prospects for the development of monster studies are visible, especially in regard to the cases in which the classical tradition encounters other cultures, ones until recently at the margin of research interest in such a context. Marilyn E. Burton opens the section with a courageous question on the nature of man as creature according to the Christian writer N. D. Wilson. Daniel A. Nkemleke and Divine Che Neba reflect on what it means to be a human or a monster in Africa on the example of chosen mythical beasts from Cameroon whom the scholars juxtapose with their Greek counterparts. Unexpectedly, this move makes these ancient creatures full of life again, as the myth in Africa is not a distant past or a fictional narrative, but a part of people's everyday existence, with feasts and storytelling sessions, in which the transcendent beings play a significant role. The journey between Europe and Africa continues in the research undertaken by Jerzy Axer and Jan Kieniewicz who track, both in literature and the Kenyan interior, the mysterious wobo – a creature featuring in the most famous children's book in Poland – *In Desert and Wilderness* by the Nobel Prize winner Henryk Sienkiewicz, best known outside the country for his "Roman" novel *Quo vadis*. On this journey the classical and

African traditions meet and merge, with the beautiful and yet often traumatic history of the continent in the background, and we can witness the fascinating phenomenon of a new myth being born. Owing to this, in the times when the creatures from Greek and Roman mythology seem quite a familiar or even tamed group, the less known monsters approach us – ready to challenge our perception of the human present, past, and the future. The next two chapters take the readers to the midst of the sea. Małgorzata Borowska follows the marine monsters from Greek archaic poetry to arrive with them at the worldwide classic for children – Carlo Collodi’s *Pinocchio* and the bloodcurdling adventures of the puppet and his father inside a great fish belly. Adam Łukaszewicz adds to this thread the context of the Egyptian tales, including the most popular one, of a Shipwrecked Sailor who not only meets some mysterious ancient monsters, but also comes back in later stories loved by the young readers, like the *Arabian Nights* and Jules Verne’s cycle of Captain Nemo. Then, here be dragons, in Robert A. Sucharski’s analyses of the famous Polish all-ages (funny for children and satirical for adults) set of novels by Stanisław Pagaczewski. The scholar traces the ancient roots of the legendary Wawel Dragon, who in Pagaczewski’s interpretation transforms into a brilliant inventor, fan of ecological automobiles, and King Krak’s best friend. Helen Lovatt closes this multi-cultural stage of our chase with the question about the “Greekness” of Harry Potter’s bestiary.

Part 5 of the volume – *And the Chase Goes On: The Monsters of Visual Culture* – contains the chapters on the reception of mythical creatures in contemporary works whose dominating component are images. The gathered case studies permit us to observe how the ancient heritage is transferred into the new spheres of human expression and how it responds there to the challenges of the present times. Elżbieta Olechowska opens the section with an analysis of the most recent French comic books on the myth of Hercules. Surprisingly, here the most interesting beast turns out to be a dog, definitely wiser than all the other human and non-human protagonists. Hanna Paulouskaya, still in the context of Hercules’ myth, chases after the ancient monsters in Soviet animated movies, in which Classical Antiquity, folklore, and propaganda work together to shape a new hero for that communist society. With Amanda Potter’s bestiary we start making a full circle in relation to the beginning of our venture and this volume, for she brings back the Minotaur(s), Medusa(s), and the Sirens into focus – now, on popular BBC television programmes that have gained a global audience – the flagship family science fiction series *Doctor Who*, the *Doctor Who* spin-off for a younger public *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, and the family fantasy show *Atlantis*. Konrad Dominas transfers his reflections on the reception of the mythical beasts onto the platform of communication that has changed societies and the culture flow worldwide – the Internet. This gives both a local and global impact to the works and enables interactions on the line author–public. As the scholar demonstrates, in this labyrinthine click-stream, there is a place for both the Minotaur and the alien robotic shapeshifters, the Transformers, who indeed

participate in transforming the ancient heritage for youth. Finally, I have the pleasure to invite the readers on a chase after the mythical beasts in Jim Henson's universe, where the ancient monsters get along with the creatures that jumped out of Henson's visionary mind to become our companions and the protagonists of a new cultural myth. The analysis of this "Muppetization" of classical mythology permits some general conclusions to be drawn on the reception of mythical beasts in the culture for young people and for all those adults who keep a sparkle of their childhood alive. Often, it is this sparkle that enables us to notice the creatures from the Greek and Roman Antiquity still today – whether on the night sky, or in the books and Hollywood blockbusters, in the old tales by our parents and tutors, on the Internet, or in the hearts and souls of the ever new generations discovering this powerful heritage.

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my utmost gratitude to the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation for making this project possible with an open-mindedness typical of its patron. It was a great honour for me to receive the Award from the Foundation's then President Prof. Helmut Schwarz at the 2014 Humboldt Annual Meeting in Berlin. I feel particularly indebted to Dr. Enno Aufderheide – the General Secretary of the Foundation, Dr. Steffen Mehlich, Dr. Judith Schildt, Rebecca Großmann, Britta Debus, Lena Schnabel, Mareike Ilsemann, the tutors of Polish fellows: Uwe Brieger, Frank Arenz, and Stephan Kochius, and all the most helpful staff whose gentle assistance made my implementation of the Award and all my research stays in Germany (I have the privilege of defining myself as a Humboldtian since 2006) always an amazing experience. I am also grateful for the hospitality to my *Gastgebers* – Prof. Bernd Seidensticker and Prof. Melanie Möller from the Free University of Berlin, and to Prof. Ulrich Schmitzer from the Humboldt-University of Berlin who kindly hosted me during my fellowship from Poland's Ministry of Research and Higher Education. A very special expression of gratitude goes to Prof. Christiane Reitz who believed in my project "deep enough and strong enough". The readers, who will arrive to the end of this volume, will discover the meaning of this quote. It is maybe something more than a mythical coincidence that the volume was accomplished in the Alexander von Humboldt Year, on the 250th Anniversary of his birthday. May our studies be our homage to the exceptional mind and heart of this eminent scholar who recognized the world as a cosmos – a Community of all the creatures and Nature. *Ad multos annos!*

Moreover, I wish to express my gratitude to His Excellency Ambassador Rolf Nickel, the extraordinary Dr. Mechthild Wagner from the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Warsaw and her outstanding successor in the function of the Science Counsellor – Ms. Gabriele Hermani – and Dr. Klaudia Knabel from the DAAD for their hospitality and engagement. I thank my colleagues

from the Polish Young Academy (AMU) at the Polish Academy of Sciences for the great time I had through all our activities in the first term of this body's functioning and for the AMU's patronage over the conference presenting the project's results. I mention with gratitude also the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts' Studio of Book Design and Illustrations with its head – Prof. Błażej Ostoja Lniski – and Prof. Zygmunt Januszewski's pupils, with Jan Rusiński in the lead. I also thank Dr. Tomasz Strączek from the University of Warsaw Gallery who hosted the exhibitions accompanying the conference. My special thanks go to Maja Abgarowicz for sharing her *Cerberus* who proudly guards the cover of this volume, to Matylda Tracewska – the author of the logo-painting (rocking Pegasus) for the whole *Our Mythical Childhood* programme, and to Zbigniew Karaszewski who designed the insert with the colour illustrations.

I am deeply grateful to the Community of the “*Artes Liberales* Institute” Foundation and my home Faculty of “*Artes Liberales*” at the University of Warsaw for their constant commitment. The conference, during which we discussed our research results, took place under the auspices of the Faculty's permanent unite Centre for Studies on the Classical Tradition (OBTA). This is a next mythical coincidence that the year of our meeting, 2016, was special both for the University of Warsaw celebrating the 200th anniversary of its establishment, and for OBTA – created in 1991 by Prof. Jerzy Axer, and thus enjoying its 25th birthday. It is due to his visionary spirit, with Prof. Jan Kieniewicz's rock-like support, that OBTA has become a meeting place for scholars, teachers, students, artists, all kinds of humans and non-humans, and more or less mythical beings. For this I wish to thank Prof. Axer and Prof. Kieniewicz *ex imo pectore*.

The publication of this volume in the series “*Studies in European Children's and Young Adult Literature*” was possible owing to Prof. Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer (doing us the honour of being aboard from the very beginning of our mythical venture) and the most helpful staff of the Universitätsverlag Winter from Heidelberg. I wish to thank particularly warmly Dr. Andreas Barth, Dr. Christina Hünsche, Laura Schaper, and Ralf Stemper.²² I express my gratitude to Dr. Elżbieta Olechowska, Dr. Hanna Paulouskaya, and Magdalena Andersen and Maria Makarewicz from my home Faculty. I am indebted also to the reviewers of the volume – Prof. Bernd Seidensticker and

²² At this point a short editorial note: We provide English translations of the passages from languages that are less broadly used in scholarship, the original versions being quoted only in the case of poetry or poetic prose. In line with common practice in our times, we also provide translations from the ancient languages. British English is the convention of the volume, yet we have resigned from the artificial adjustments of forms in the chapters written by American scholars; similarly, the definition of time (BC/AD or BCE/CE) remains with the authors, in order to maintain a golden mean between the coherence and autonomy of expression. The transcriptions from non-Latin contemporary alphabets are also provided.

Dr. Sonja Schreiner – for all their insightful remarks. My very special thanks go to Monika Wenzel who created a beautiful asylum for our monsters in the form of the layout for the present volume. It was an outstanding cooperation, both in terms of personal culture and professional skills. And I wish to assure the readers that no mythical creature was harmed at any stage of our work.

Last but not least, I thank my truly mythical colleagues and friends from all over the world for their faith and engagement – “deep enough and strong enough” – through the whole project. Again, you need to travel with us to the end of this volume to grasp the essence of the quote. In conclusion, I am most pleased to add that this adventure is going forward – the programme is developing within the framework of the European Research Council Consolidator Grant for the project *Our Mythical Childhood... The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges* (2016–2021). It is owing to this project that we have been able to deepen our research results through both further studies in the field of the reception of ancient mythology and history, and the utmost inspiring discussions during the international workshops and conferences of our mythical community in Warsaw in 2017, 2018, and 2019. I therefore wish to thank the Project Officers from the European Research Council Executive Agency, Ms. Sandrine Barreaux who supported us in the first phase of the project's implementation and Ms. Katia Menegon whose kind and wise guidance is helping us to make our scholarly dreams come true. The present volume, conceived in the spirit of Alexander von Humboldt and brought to conclusion within the ERC grant, is at once the fruit and the proof of exemplary academic cooperation on all levels – from the scholars, through the administration staff, to the institutions that give us the opportunity to chart new trails in research. *Gratias ago!*

Warning

This book is dangerous. Not that it would bite off your fingers (I do, however, advise Readers to stroke its spine from time to time). But there is a side-effect of communing with mythical creatures that should be taken into consideration. Close encounters with them expose humans to the risk of a metamorphosis that – in line with the well-known law of mythology – is irreversible. The ancient monsters startle us and knock us out of our mundane rhythms; they make us reflect on the nature of the world and see more than is often comfortable to see. For behind the mask of terrible beasts – lost people may be hiding, ones begging for salvation from themselves. Just like Mia's brother in Schnell's movie. This requires a decision to be taken.

Out of the love and empathy she importantly learnt from the ancient myths, Mia will hear Levin's cry. She will not contribute to sending her brother to death, but will wage a heroic battle to save him. We do not know this battle's outcome (Schnell respects his young viewers and avoids easy happy endings),

but she might very well succeed. Or better: they might succeed, for this is a joint effort against the source of the boy's pain that unleashed the monster – the poignant feeling of loneliness. In the final scene we watch Mia with Levin, joined by their mother, in the rising sun, its rays washing over the family. Hope is in the air, nothing more or less.²³

Schnell audaciously merges the borders between the hero, the victim, and the beast, but this is precisely how reception works: we all can share and shape the ancient myths so that they support us in the dark hours which produce monsters – the monsters often much more frightening than our companion creatures from childhood. Levin felt lonely – yet Schnell in his vision of loneliness as the catalyst of the boy's crisis is not alone. It was the feeling of being abandoned and rejected that finally destroyed Dr. Frankenstein's Creature in Mary Shelley's novel, and the very Doctor as well. Similarly Hawthorne, in his bold interpretation of the Cretan myth, emphasizes this aspect of the existence of the Minotaur and he pities him – “separated from all good companionship, as this poor monster was” (1970, 240).

The fates of these and many other protagonists, whom the Readers will meet in this volume, are a vital testimony to the importance of the Community we build, together with mythical beasts and by means of the universal code of the ancient myths. The sense of security that we live in a world – the ancient-Humboldtian *cosmos* – in which we share certain universal values and feel accepted in spite of certain differences, is what we and the monsters need – not to be monsters.

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²³ Hope was the topic of our subsequent encounter with childhood and Classical Antiquity: *Our Mythical Hope in Children's and Young Adults' Culture... The (In)efficacy of Ancient Myths in Overcoming the Hardships of Life*, May 15–21, 2017, at OBTA, Faculty of “Artes Liberales” UW, within the ERC Consolidator Grant (see the project's website: <<http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/>>).

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PART 1

IN THE MAZE OF YOUTH: MEETING THE MINOTAUR



Maja Abgarowicz, *The Minotaur* (2012).
Illustration created at the Workshop of Prof. Zygmunt Januszewski,
Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw.

SHEILA MURNAGHAN with DEBORAH H. ROBERTS

“A Kind of Minotaur”: Literal and Spiritual Monstrosity in the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne

Any author who retells classical myths for children faces the challenge of making stories that were not originally intended for children – at least not as we know them from our literary sources – conform to prevailing ideas about suitable material for child audiences. The myths that have come down to us regularly feature themes considered to be among the most unsuitable, such as sexuality, violence, and cruelty. Human actors who transgress accepted norms of behavior appear along with fantastic monsters who embody the dangerous, untamed forces with which humans must contend both in the wider world and within themselves. Those monsters often take the form of disturbing hybrids, which point up the bestial elements within the human. This challenge is addressed head-on at the very beginning of the tradition of classical myths retold for children by the American writer Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864), author of the two pioneering myth collections, *A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys* (1851) and *Tanglewood Tales* (1853). In those books, Hawthorne’s light-hearted, wonder-filled adaptations of the original myths are accompanied by a series of programmatic comments that draw attention to the process of revision by which they were created and to the distinct perspectives on the same mythical events of the adult author and his envisioned child readers. As the following discussion will show, that double vision can also be seen in the relationship between Hawthorne’s retold myths and the scenarios described in the American-set fictions for adults that he was writing during the same period, and in the complex treatment that he gives in *Tanglewood Tales* to the Minotaur, one of the most provocative hybrids among the mythical beasts of Antiquity.

Hawthorne’s commentary on his own transformative practice is introduced primarily through the frame story in which his retold myths are embedded.¹ In *A Wonder-Book*, a college student named Eustace Bright tells the myths to a group of younger cousins and their friends during vacations at an estate in rural Massachusetts, known as Tanglewood. The myths are interspersed with

¹ On the aims and methods of Hawthorne’s myth books, including his use of the frame narrative, see Laffrado (1992, 66–131); Donovan (2002); Murnaghan and Roberts (2018, 22–45).

depictions of those children and their idyllic, leisured country life, as well as Eustace's observations about his storytelling, particularly in a debate with Mr. Pringle, the classically-educated father of some of the children, who accuses him of adapting the classical myths too freely. To Mr. Pringle, the effect of Eustace's reworking is "like bedaubing a marble statue with paint", while Eustace claims the classical versions are themselves adaptations, in which Greek authors made the myths too much like statues, turning them into "shapes of indestructible beauty, indeed, but cold and heartless" (Hawthorne 1982, 1254–1255).

In the second collection, *Tanglewood Tales*, Hawthorne omits these narrative elements but maintains the claim that Eustace Bright is the author of the tales contained in the volume, which are ostensibly written versions of stories he has told to the same group of children. In the "Introduction" to *Tanglewood Tales*, Hawthorne presents himself as Bright's editor and reports an exchange between the two of them that features a recipe for making myths suitable for children. Presented with the manuscript of the new collection, Hawthorne wonders how Bright could have possibly carried this off, elaborating further on the deficiencies of the Greek originals:

[...] I did not quite see, I confess, how he could have obviated all the difficulties in the way of rendering them presentable to children. These old legends, so brimming over with everything that is most abhorrent to our Christianized moral-sense – some of them so hideous – others so melancholy and miserable, amid which the Greek tragedians sought their themes, and moulded them into the sternest forms of grief that ever the world saw; – was such material the stuff that children's play-things should be made of! How were they to be purified? How was the blessed sunshine to be thrown into them? (1309–1310)

In his response, Bright rejects the premises of Hawthorne's question, again insisting that the Greek versions of the myths are themselves the result of reworking. No process of purification is necessary, because the stories are inherently pure; they stem from a primordial golden age, to which children are naturally attuned:

But Eustace told me that these myths were the most singular things in the world, and that he was invariably astonished, whenever he began to relate one, by the readiness with which it adapted itself to the childish purity of his auditors. The objectionable characteristics seem to be a parasitical growth, having no essential connection with the original fable. They fall away, and are thought of no more, the instant he puts his imagination in sympathy with the innocent little circle, whose wide-open eyes are fixed so eagerly upon him. Thus the stories (not by any strained effort of the narrator's, but in harmony with their inherent germ) transform themselves, and re-assume the shapes which they might be supposed to possess in the pure childhood of the world. (1310)

Bright aligns the myths with a view of childhood that is rooted in Romanticism: a distinctive time of innocence and spiritual purity, naturally connected to the most essential and primeval stage of human evolution, and sharply distinct from adulthood, which is marked by corruption and loss. So he concludes:

Evil had never yet existed; and sorrow, misfortune, crime, were mere shadows which the mind fancifully created for itself, as a shelter against too sunny realities – or, at most, but prophetic dreams, to which the dreamer himself did not yield a waking credence. Children are now the only representatives of the men and women of that happy era; and therefore it is that we must raise the intellect and fancy to the level of childhood, in order to re-create the original myths. (1310)

The fictional storyteller’s account of the spontaneous generation of authentic myths naturally suitable for children is set alongside the real author’s account of a process of deliberate revision, formulated through rhetorical questions and characterized through metaphors. The myths have to be “purified” through the suppression – which Bright describes as an automatic falling away – of “objectionable characteristics”. What remains after this purification has to be made more cheerful through the addition of “sunshine” and also more playful, so that it corresponds to “children’s playthings”. Hawthorne here sets an agenda that shaped the subsequent tradition of myth for children, with its many strategies for evading or suppressing material viewed as inappropriate and its many ways of making the myths both sunnier and more playful.

Hawthorne’s fictional dialogue between himself and Eustace Bright makes explicit the division that is more often tacitly assumed between the perspective of the adult storyteller, well aware of the human capacity for error and transgression depicted in the original myths, most markedly in the genre of tragedy, and the presumed innocence of his child audience. This adult knowledge is shared even by Hawthorne’s youthful surrogate. The aptly named Bright is able to enter into the mentality of his child audience to “put his imagination in sympathy with the innocent little circle”, but to do so he has to stop thinking about things that he knows, that are present in his mind: “the objectionable characteristics [...] *are thought of no more*” (emphasis added). Darker thoughts lurk even in the pure and happy outlook preserved by children, although those thoughts remain in the background, downplayed as “mere shadows” that counter a too-sunny picture or as “prophetic dreams”.

Immediately after quoting Eustace’s protestations, Hawthorne gives himself the final word, adding his opinion that Bright will soon become less sunny in his outlook:

I let the youthful author talk, as much and as extravagantly as he pleased, and was glad to see him commencing life with such confidence in himself and his performances. A few years will do all that is necessary towards showing him the truth, in both respects. (1982, 1310)

As several critics have pointed out, that process already colors the tales that follow, where the voice of the narrator is often closer to the older, less illusioned Hawthorne than to the optimistic Bright (Baym 1973; Laffrado 1992, 66–131). Through this narrative voice, Hawthorne self-consciously tempers his entertaining, wonder-inspiring, child-friendly versions of the myths with intimations of an adult outlook that acknowledges those versions as purposeful revisions, admitting to his adult readers what they already know, and at the same time participating in a common – some would say universal – project of children’s literature, showing his child readers some of that adult truth that they, like Eustace Bright, will eventually have to recognize.²

For all their playfulness and good cheer, Hawthorne’s myth books subtly incorporate the vision conveyed in his fiction for adults, especially the two book-length “Romances” (as he labeled them) that he wrote during the same period: *The Scarlet Letter*, published in 1850, and *The House of the Seven Gables*, published in 1851. In those works Hawthorne explores in an American, Christianized setting many of the themes of Greek tragedy, the genre in which he locates the most objectionable forms of the Greek myths: sexual transgression; cruel and violent behavior stemming from arrogance, greed, and excess; destructive curses that descend through families. There is a close symbiosis between these adult romances and the children’s myth books, where some of Hawthorne’s most striking innovations are reworkings of his own American fables as much as of Greek myths. The same themes are differently handled for different audiences through the storyteller’s freedom to shape and color his material, a freedom Hawthorne claims for himself in the preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*.³ There he writes that the author of a Romance (as opposed to a realistic novel) must not “swerve aside from the truth of the human heart” but “may so manage his atmospherical medium as to bring out or mellow the lights and deepen and enrich the shadows of his picture”. At the same time, he prescribes restraint: the author of a Romance should “mingle the Marvellous [...] as a slight, delicate, and evanescent flavor” (Hawthorne 2006, 3).

In his myths for children, Hawthorne tells stories that echo the tragic, but also Christianized, conception of human nature and human experience found in his adult Romances while giving them different atmospherics, emphasizing the marvellous, bringing out the lights, and limiting the shadows. He does this in part through narrative features that realize his own metaphors for the required process of revision: stories into which sunshine has been thrown become stories about the literal presence of sunshine; cold and rigid statues are softened and endowed

² For an extended and influential account of the view that children’s literature is designed to instill adult perspectives, see Nodelman (2008).

³ On the many thematic connections between Hawthorne’s myth books and his adult fiction, see McPherson (1969); Pfister (1996, 244–250); on the interrelation of myth and romance in his works, see Hoffman (1964).

with color; myths are transformed into accounts of spontaneous transformation; fantastic creatures and significant objects are reconceived as playthings.⁴ In his adult fictions, by contrast, he evokes the marvelous events of Greek myth, not as actual occasions for wonder and delight as in the children’s books, but as metaphors, or allegories, for the spiritual conditions to which fallen humans are subject.

This relationship between literal myth and the figuration of a spiritual condition can be illustrated through a passage from Hawthorne’s best-known work, *The Scarlet Letter*, an account of the consequences of adultery set in Puritan Boston during the 1640s. The narrator is describing Pearl, the child born from the adulterous union that sets the plot in motion; as he puts it, her “innocent life had sprung [...] out of the rank luxuriance of a guilty passion” (Hawthorne 2000, 80). Pearl displays a premature adult waywardness, and her willful, defiant, even demonic nature points up the idealized character of Eustace Bright’s picture of pure childhood innocence.⁵ Her troublesome temperament is defined through a reference to the myth of Cadmus sowing dragon’s teeth and reaping a harvest of ferocious warriors. Cut off from other children by her mother’s outcast status, Pearl has to invent her own playmates:

She never created a friend, but seemed to be always sowing broadcast the dragon’s teeth, whence sprung a harvest of armed enemies, against which she rushed to battle. It was inexpressibly sad – then what depth of sorrow to a mother, who felt in her own heart the cause! – to observe, in one so young, this constant recognition of an adverse world... (Hawthorne 2000, 86).

Pearl’s inherently defiant nature and her social isolation produce in her a distorted spiritual state, which is manifested in her belligerent imagination, and the metaphor of the dragon’s teeth serves as an allegory of this condition. But when Hawthorne presents Cadmus sowing the dragon’s teeth as an actual event in one of the *Tanglewood Tales*, the episode takes on the playfulness that Pearl so sadly forfeits, as he exploits the absurdity that derives from treating mythic events as concrete literal occurrences in the real world:⁶

⁴ On the routine transformation of toys through children’s play as a model for romance’s investment of the ordinary with spiritual significance, see Sánchez-Eppeler (2004, 156–157).

⁵ On Pearl’s ambiguous nature, combining both innocence and taint, and its relationship to Hawthorne’s own experience of parenthood, see Sánchez-Eppeler (2004, 153–156).

⁶ Hawthorne here constructs a realistic alternative to his own romance that is in effect a parody of the more realistic novel, which “is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man’s experience” (2006, 3).

It was strange, too, to observe how the earth, out of which they had so lately grown, was incrustated, here-and-there, on their bright breastplates, and even begrimed their faces; just as you may have seen it clinging to beets and carrots, when pulled out of their native soil. Cadmus hardly knew whether to consider them men, or some odd kind of vegetable; although, on the whole, he concluded that there was human nature in them, because they were so fond of trumpets and weapons, and so ready to draw blood. (Hawthorne 1982, 1379)

The knowing adult's awareness of evil human nature is present in the final sentence, but as an afterthought, muted by the narrator's jocular tone and cordoned off from the perspective urged on the child audience. Between the alternatives in Cadmus' divided mind, Hawthorne's child addressees are directed to the absurd, innocuous, nonhuman, and material view of the sown men as "an odd kind of vegetable", encouraged to recall the beets and carrots of their own experience.

This stress on the sown men as entertaining objects connects with other scenes in the myth books in which Hawthorne entertains his readers with magical objects that behave like animated toys, embracing not only the playfulness but the thing-i-ness of playthings. One example is the marvelous winged staff entwined by snakes (i.e. the caduceus) that belongs to Quicksilver (Hawthorne's name for Mercury), the nimble, whimsical instigator of many magical events, whose winged sandals make it appear "as if his feet sometime rose from the ground by their own accord" (1263). When Quicksilver arrives at the cottage of the old couple Baucis and Philemon, he throws his staff on the ground, but it jumps up and places itself beside the door, where Philemon admires it and thinks: "It would be an excellent kind of stick for a little boy to ride astride of" (1263). Then, when they go inside, "what should it do, but immediately spread its little wings, and go hopping and fluttering up the door-steps! Tap, tap went the staff on the kitchen-floor; nor did it rest, until it had stood itself on end, with the greatest gravity and decorum, beside Quicksilver's chair" (1265).

Quicksilver's self-moving staff seems, like its owner, to epitomize the retold myths, which Bright presents as spontaneously shaking off their grimmer accretions and transforming themselves. It is also reminiscent of the actual mechanical toys or automata that began to be made and sold in America beginning in the 1840s (McClary 1997, 23; Jaffé 2006, 181).⁷ Hawthorne slyly acknowledges the fantastical and child-oriented nature of this object when he mentions the further detail that when the staff stopped moving "the snakes continued to wriggle", then distances himself from his own narration, countering the innocent old man's

⁷ The automaton as child's toy is a benign version of the more sinister automata that were widely depicted by Romantic writers, including Hawthorne himself, in response to anxieties about industrial mechanization, militarism, and economic manipulation by unseen forces. See Demson (2012); Blackford (2014, 91–95); and on the complexity of Hawthorne's stance towards mechanization, Benesch (2002, 63–96).

child-like vision with a knowing adult perspective: “But, in my private opinion, old Philemon’s eyesight had been playing him tricks again” (1264).

As in his account of the dragon’s teeth, Hawthorne draws repeatedly in the myth books on the motif of magical transformation to make the spiritual evils he explores in his adult fiction concrete, externally visible, humorous, and inconsequential. *The Scarlet Letter* begins with a semi-autobiographical account of the time Hawthorne spent as the surveyor of the Custom House in Salem. This includes an extended description of the other men who work there, a group of lazy, corrupt, elderly political appointees in a state of spiritual death. The real danger of this environment is made clear in its effect on the narrator: he becomes dull and numb, no longer interested in writing and no longer responsive to nature. The worst of the group is the Permanent Inspector, who has enjoyed a lifetime of undemanding government service:

He possessed no power of thought, no depth of feeling, no troublesome sensibilities; nothing, in short, but a few commonplace instincts, which, aided by the cheerful temper that grew inevitably out of his physical well-being, did duty very respectably, and to general acceptance, in lieu of a heart. (Hawthorne 2000, 16)

The narrator explicitly compares the Permanent Inspector to an animal, but then adds:

One point, in which he had vastly the advantage over his four-footed brethren, was his ability to recollect the good dinners which it had made no small portion of the happiness of his life to eat. His gourmandism was a highly agreeable trait; and to hear him talk of roast-meat was as appetizing as a pickle or an oyster. (17)

There is clearly an element of humor in this description, but it is the bitter and angry humor of a satirist. *Tanglewood Tales* offers a more light-hearted and playful portrayal of gourmandizing in a retold version of the episode in Homer’s *Odyssey* of Odysseus’ visit to Circe, who famously turns his men into pigs.⁸ Here Hawthorne develops an idea implicit in Homer, that Odysseus’ men are more animal-like than he is and their transformation reflects their nature. He presents the members of Ulysses’ crew (using Odysseus’ Latin name) as able to think of nothing but food and repeatedly refers to them as “gourmandizers”. When they arrive at Circe’s palace ahead of Ulysses, they are easily seduced by an enormous meal. The shallowness of these men leads not to dark comparisons, as in the Custom-House episode, but to literal conversion into animals. Circe touches them with her wand declaring:

⁸ On Hawthorne’s version in relation to other retellings of the Circe myth for children, see Murnaghan (2015).

'You are already swine in everything but the human form, which you disgrace. [...] it will require only the slightest exercise of magic, to make the exterior conform to the hoggish disposition. Assume your proper shapes, gourmandizers, and begone to the sty!' (Hawthorne 1982, 1397)

The result is the undignified spectacle of "hogs on cushioned thrones", at which the narrator exclaims: "Dear me! What pendulous ears they had; what little red eyes, half-buried in fat; and what long snouts, instead of Grecian noses" (ibid.). Just as the Custom-House narrative is not devoid of humor, this tale is not devoid of moral disgust; in assuming their "proper shapes", Ulysses' men hint at the inherent human ugliness that is denied when the retold myths, according to Bright, "re-assume the shapes which they might be supposed to possess in the pure childhood of the world" (1310). But the emphasis is squarely on the delightful ludicrousness of the transformation, which is also in the end reversible (although the men do remain irredeemably gluttonous).

In Hawthorne's retelling of the Midas myth, the power of material transformation is granted by Quicksilver to the foolish protagonist, whose consuming greed leads him to wish for the ability to turn everything he touches into gold. Midas is himself a bit of a gourmandizer and he first discovers how inconvenient it is to have this golden touch while eating breakfast. Exploiting the comic effect of introducing modernizing details into a classical myth, Hawthorne gives an extended account of how Midas' coffee, his brook trout, his hot cakes, his egg, and finally a potato all turn into gold:

He found his mouth full, not of mealy potatoe, but of solid metal, which so burnt his tongue that he roared aloud, and jumping up from the table he began to dance and stamp around the room, both with pain and affright. (1204)

Not only is Midas subjected to the ridiculous fate of biting down on a hot metal potato, he is himself turned into a kind of automaton, performing an involuntary dance that at once dramatizes and trivializes the lack of self-control manifested in his greed.

It is only when Midas touches his beloved daughter Marygold (for whose sake he had been so eager for gold in the first place) and she turns into a golden statue that the tone of the story becomes momentarily more somber, so much so that the narrator introduces his account of Midas' response with a kind of *praeteritio*, acknowledging that he is about to describe what his readers would not want to know: "It would be too sad a story, if I were to tell you how Midas, in the fullness of all his gratified desires, began to wring his hands and bemoan himself..." (1206). But only momentarily, since for Midas, the literalization of what is in his heart proves positively instructive:

It had been a favorite phrase of Midas, whenever he felt particularly fond of the child, to say she was worth her weight in gold. And now the phrase had become literally true. And now, at last, when it was too late, he felt how infinitely a warm and tender heart that loved him, exceeded in value all the wealth that could be piled up betwixt the earth and sky! (1206)

In this gentle, magical world, it is not in fact too late for Midas: he learns his lesson and overcomes his greed. Quicksilver takes pity on him, observing that “[y]our own heart, I perceive, has not entirely changed from flesh to gold” (1207), and reverses the golden touch. Marygold comes back to life, completely unaware that she has been turned into a statue; the only lasting effect is that her hair color is improved by a “golden tinge” (1209). Eustace Bright’s narrative procedure as described by Mr. Pringle is realized within the story, as a “hard and inflexible” (1205) statue is reanimated and “bedaubed with color”.

Marygold is Hawthorne’s own addition to the myth and, as the principal source of joy in her father’s life, she plays a role similar to that of another child character that he also introduced into the mythical tradition: Proserpina as she is reimagined in his version of the Demeter and Persephone myth. Hawthorne avoids the story’s objectionable themes of death and sexual initiation by turning Proserpina into a little girl and Hades, or Pluto, into a lonely old man who only wants some company. Pluto is not looking for a wife but for someone who will brighten up his palace: “a merry little maid, to run up stairs and down, and cheer up the rooms with her smile” (1413).⁹ This conception of Proserpina allows Hawthorne to carry out his agenda of throwing “blessed sunlight” into the received myth: Pluto is allergic to sunlight and carries Proserpina as quickly as possible into his realm of perpetual darkness, which is artificially lit by the gleam of many jewels. There she begins to have a softening effect on him, even though she is mourning the loss of her mother Ceres:

And, though he pretended to dislike the sunshine of the upper world, yet the effect of this child’s presence, bedimmed as she was by her tears, was as if a faint and watery sunbeam had somehow or other found its way into the enchanted hall. (1416)

The stories of Proserpina and Marygold are both reworkings, not only of the ancient myths on which they are overtly based, but of stories that Hawthorne himself had very recently told in *The House of the Seven Gables*.¹⁰ There the house at the center of the plot is under a curse, dating back to its original builder and the family patriarch, Colonel Pyncheon, who stole the land on which it was

⁹ Cf. Quicksilver’s staff hopping up the stairs of Baucis and Philemon’s cottage.

¹⁰ *The House of the Seven Gables* was written during a five-month period beginning in September 1850 and published in April 1851. *A Wonder-Book* was written during the summer of 1851, *Tanglewood Tales* early in 1853.

built. At the time in which the story is set, in the 1850s, the decrepit and gloomy house is a version of Pluto's Underworld palace, inhabited by two of Colonel Pyncheon's descendants, an old and deeply discouraged brother and sister. Early in the narrative, a young girl cousin arrives from the country, takes up residence with them, and brings new happiness into their lives. Her status as ray of sunlight is clear from her name, Phoebe, the female version of Apollo's epithet Phoebus, which itself means 'bright'. Phoebe's cheering presence is felt early on in an episode in which she makes breakfast for her elderly cousins. This generates another mythical reference, one which both evokes the golden age and refers to a story in which – as Hawthorne tells it – a figure very like Phoebe plays a redemptive role:

Phoebe's Indian cakes were the sweetest offering of all – in their hue, befitting the rustic altars of the innocent and golden age – or, so brightly yellow were they, resembling some of the bread which was changed to glistening gold, when Midas tried to eat it. (Hawthorne 2006, 73)¹¹

Phoebe brings the sunshine and optimism of the myth books into a narrative that culminates in a happy ending with the breaking of the curse and the departure of the main characters from the house. But as this plot unfolds, Phoebe both learns the history of the house, with its legacy of cruelty and greed, and falls in love with, and agrees to marry, a young man who lives there as a boarder. Unlike the cheerful girl companions of the myth books, Phoebe is subject to the passage of time; she crosses the threshold from childhood to adulthood; she comes to know the darker sides of the human heart; and she has a fully realized existence as a marriageable, sexually mature woman. So, as the story progresses, her brightness dims a little, as the narrator notes:

Though not so blooming as when she first tript into our story – for in the few intervening weeks, her experiences had made her graver, more womanly, and deeper-eyed, in token of a heart that had begun to suspect its depths – still there was the quiet glow of natural sunshine over her. Neither had she forfeited her proper gift of making things look real, rather than fantastic, within her sphere. (209)

And here Hawthorne makes it clear that adult knowledge is not always or entirely a bad thing, while also suggesting, as he does in the Midas myth, that the substitution of concrete reality for insubstantial fantasy can lead to spiritual health as well as to childish humor.

¹¹ In *A Wonder-Book*, where resemblance is replaced by literal identity, Midas eats a breakfast hot cake “that assumed the yellow hue of Indian meal”, but “if it really had been an Indian hot cake, Midas would have prized it a good deal more than he now did” (Hawthorne 1982, 1204).

Embedded in this account of Phoebe’s progression towards somewhat diminished sunniness is another much darker and more uncanny story, involving an earlier member of the Pyncheon family. Like others in his line, this Mr. Pyncheon is obsessed with finding a lost document, the deed to a large tract of land that will convey enormous wealth. He summons a young wizard, who is an enemy of the family but who is thought to know the whereabouts of this document. The younger man claims that he may be able to provide the desired information, but only if he can talk to Pyncheon’s daughter Alice, who is not a little girl but a mature young woman, and powerfully affected by the wizard’s sexual magnetism. While her father stands by, ignoring her cry for help, the wizard rivets Alice’s attention and puts her into a trance, channeling her mind for information about the deed, and making her immobile – in other words, making her like a statue. Finally, her horrified father grabs and shakes her, but his touch achieves nothing, and he falls into a convulsive rage at the wizard, who coolly berates him: “Is it my crime, if you have sold your daughter for the mere hope of getting a sheet of yellow parchment into your grasp?” (147). Here the color yellow has its evil association with gold rather than its noble association with sunshine and healthy hot cakes. The wizard ultimately releases Alice so that she can move again, but she remains under his power and soon dies as a result. Unlike Marygold, who is only improved by her transformations, Alice Pyncheon is sacrificed to her father’s greed, which is not overcome, as in the case of Midas, but remains rooted in his soul and is passed down to his descendants.

When he comes to tell the story of the Minotaur, a genuinely hybrid figure who permanently combines human and inhuman characteristics rather than switching back and forth like the sown men or Ulysses’ companions, Hawthorne brings into one of his myths a more evenly balanced mixture of the serious moral allegorizing found in his adult works and the lighthearted, entertaining literalizing of the children’s works. As the product of a shocking sexual union between a human woman, Pasiphaë, and a bull, and as a voracious monster who feeds on young humans, the Minotaur epitomizes the kind of “objectionable characteristics” that Eustace Bright claims are “thought of no more” when the narrator is in touch with the mentality of children. In his account of the band of Athenian youths and maidens, led by Theseus, who travel to Crete to be sacrificed, Hawthorne presents the Minotaur precisely as something that young people do not think about:

And, though it was a sad business enough, I rather question whether fourteen young people, without any old persons to keep them in order, could contrive to spend the whole time of the voyage in being miserable. There had been some few dances upon the undulating deck, I suspect, and some hearty bursts of laughter, and other such unseasonable merriment among the victims, before the high, blue mountains of Crete began to show themselves among the far-off clouds. (Hawthorne 1982, 1326)

But when the scene shifts to Crete, the Minotaur has to be confronted, at least by Theseus, who is undergoing a decisive coming of age which makes “all his foregone adventures seem like mere boy’s play” (1323). As Theseus arrives at the center of the Labyrinth and meets the Minotaur, Hawthorne introduces the monster through a sequence of perspectives in which his two sides are separated and distinguished. But rather than being split into distinct human and animal selves, the Minotaur appears as two differently imagined human-animal combinations: a ludicrously capering spectacle with the outward form of a bull or a spiritually compromised human:

Sure enough what an ugly monster it was! Only his horned head belonged to a bull; and yet, somehow or other, he looked like a bull all over, preposterously waddling on his hind-legs; or, if you happened to view him in another way, he seemed wholly a man, and all the more monstrous for being so. (1333)

From this second perspective, the monstrosity of the Minotaur is a state of internal ugliness, towards which Theseus reacts with mingled horror and pity:

And there he was, the wretched thing, with no society, no companion, no kind of mate, living only to do mischief, and incapable of knowing what affection means! Theseus hated him, and shuddered at him, and yet could not but be sensible of some sort of pity, and all the more, the uglier and more detestable the creature was. (1333)

Theseus’ sensitivity allows him to interpret the Minotaur’s half-articulate roaring: he “understood that the Minotaur was saying to himself how miserable he was, and how hungry, and how he hated everybody, and how he longed to eat up the human race alive!” (ibid.). The Minotaur turns out to be, like Pearl in *The Scarlet Letter*, a childish creature whose inner life is blighted by the lack of companionship; his ugliness is the product of conditions Minos has imposed on him by isolating him in the Labyrinth and starving him.

Theseus has already articulated this understanding in his earlier meeting with Minos: “I tell thee to thy face, King Minos, thou art a more hideous monster than the Minotaur himself” (1329), and rather than confining his adult perspective to a jocular aside as in his comment on Cadmus’ sown men, Hawthorne’s narrator spells out the allegorical significance of the Minotaur’s animal element and the serious moral lesson that his readers will one day learn from it:

Ah, the bull-headed villain! And, Oh, my good little people, you will perhaps see, one of these days, as I do now, that every human being, who suffers something evil to get into his nature, or to remain there, is a kind of Minotaur, an enemy of his fellow-creatures, and separated from all good companionship, as this poor monster was! (1333)

This overt allegorizing is one way of bringing the myths in line with what Hawthorne describes in the “Introduction” to *Tanglewood Tales* as a “Christianized moral sense”. We see the same strategy employed by one of Hawthorne’s now-forgotten predecessors, J. M. Neale (1818–1866), an English clergyman who published in 1847 a volume for children of *Stories from Heathen Mythology and Greek History* that anticipates Hawthorne in its narrative mode but displays an anxiety that Hawthorne does not about the pagan origins of the myths. Neale deals with this anxiety in part by offering such interpretations as this (which comes after his account of the Perseus myth):

This is, when rightly explained, a very true story; and what is stranger, it is or ought to be true of every one of those who read it. We have all of us a Medusa, against whom we are bound to go forth, and whom we must kill, if we would not have her kill us. The world, the flesh, and the devil are the three Gorgons whom we have to fight. [...] And why are we bound to fight manfully against ourselves? Why, but for the same reason as the hero of my story had. To shew our love to the Great King That made us His own when we were infants, and has all our lives long fed, and guarded us. (Neale 1847, 18–19)

In comparison, however, Hawthorne’s allegorizing is free of doctrine and much more fully engaged with the psychology of sin-prone human nature. As he makes the Minotaur part of a story for “little people” who do not yet think this way, Hawthorne also introduces the mitigating playfulness, closely tied to the marvelous, that is a hallmark of his reworked myths. One marvelous feature of this myth is the Labyrinth in which the Minotaur is imprisoned. Ariadne describes it to Theseus as “the most *wondrous*” of Daedalus’ “artful contrivances” (Hawthorne 1982, 1330, emphasis added). The Minotaur’s presence there is a quirky and mischievous gesture on the part of cruel king Minos, as the narrator explains when he introduces the Minotaur, again as a subject children would not want to think about:

It seems that, in the island of Crete, there lived a certain dreadful monster, called a Minotaur, which was shaped partly like a man and partly like a bull, and was altogether such a hideous sort of creature, that it is really disagreeable to think of him. If he were suffered to exist at all, it should have been on some desert island, or in the duskiness of some deep cavern, where nobody ever would be tormented by his abominable aspect. But King Minos, who reigned over Crete, laid out a great deal of money in building a habitation for the Minotaur, and took great care of his health and comfort, merely for mischief’s sake. (1324)

In other words, the Labyrinth is a kind of plaything for the evil Minos, where he keeps what Hawthorne describes as his “pet-monster”, and this is made even clearer as the narrator recounts Theseus’ entrance into it, using a term for a popular kind of puzzle or game: “How this labyrinth was built, is more than I can tell

you. But so cunningly contrived a mizmaze was never seen in the world, before nor since" (1332).

In the same spirit, Hawthorne foregrounds the absurd in his account of Theseus' ultimate battle with the Minotaur. This begins when the Minotaur charges at Theseus but misses and hits his head against a wall, breaking off one of his horns. "Smarting with the pain, he galloped around the open space in so ridiculous a way that Theseus laughed at it, long afterwards, though not precisely at this moment". The Minotaur does succeed in grazing Theseus and throwing him to the ground, "and thinking he had stabbed him to the heart, he cut a great caper in the air, opened his bull-mouth from ear-to-ear, and prepared to snap his head off". But Theseus leaps up again and manages a fatal sword thrust: "he hit him fair upon the neck, and made his bull head skip six yards from his human body, which fell down flat upon the ground" (1334–1335). The Minotaur's ridiculous galloping recalls Midas' stamping and dancing when he bites the hot potato; both movements recall the more benign "playful leaps and airy caperings" (1293) of the magical horse Pegasus and the nimble footwork of Eustace Bright, who is "as light and active as if he had wings to his shoes" (1166), and of Quicksilver, Bright's surrogate within the stories.

The Minotaur's end resembles that of Minos' other pet monster, the giant brass automaton Talus, who walks "with a kind of jerk in its gait which [...] caused the young prince to suspect that it was no true giant, but only a *wonderful* piece of machinery" (1327, emphasis added).¹² Talus finally tumbles "full-length into the sea, which splashed high over his gigantic shape, as when an iceberg turns a somerset" (1337): in this comparison, nature itself plays children's games. In the case of the Minotaur, the lonely, wretched misfit deserving of human pity who is known to the adult narrator recedes into the background to be replaced by a cartoonish loser more suited to a child audience. As this happens, the provocative mixture of human and animal elements that makes the Minotaur so apt a figure for spiritual deformation is finally and literally resolved: the two strands of his nature are located in distinct parts of his body and cleanly separated by Theseus' sword.¹³

In his description of the Minotaur as a very different creature depending on how "you happened to view him", Hawthorne at once distinguishes and combines the different approaches to representing human sinfulness that characterize his adult-directed romances and child-directed myth collections. As Deborah Roberts' chapter in this volume shows in detail, the many illustrators who have

¹² On Talus in relation to Romantic concerns about soldiers as unfeeling puppets, see Demson (2012, 78–82).

¹³ Cf. Hawthorne's treatment of the Gorgon myth. When Perseus first comes across Medusa, she is humanized and her monstrosity is psychologized: he finds her sleeping "with an unquiet expression disturbing her features, as if the monster were troubled with an ugly dream". But when he attacks her with his sword, "the head of the wicked Medusa tumbled from her body" (1982, 1185–1186).

depicted the Minotaur in the long subsequent tradition of children’s myth books have developed a range of strategies for representing the Minotaur’s hybrid nature in visual form. While some illustrators have produced images that, like Hawthorne’s narrative in *Tanglewood Tales*, integrate elements of the disturbing and the distancing, others have chosen to favor one way of viewing him rather than the other, either as a troubled human or as a comical plaything. This polarizing strategy can be illustrated through a few examples that also align with the question of audience to which Hawthorne himself was so responsive.

The first example appears in an edition of the two myth collections, issued in 1900, that figures as one volume in a complete set of Hawthorne’s works and so assimilates his children’s works to his larger adult output. The artist is the great American illustrator Howard Pyle (1853–1911), who is often credited with bringing a new element of dramatic intensity to book illustration (cf. Fig. 1).¹⁴



Fig. 1: Howard Pyle, *Theseus ... caught the monster off his guard*, illustration from Nathaniel Hawthorne, *A Wonder Book for Girls and Boys, and Tanglewood Tales*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1900, separate leaf between pp. 284 and 285.

¹⁴ For Pyle’s career and impact on the development of American book illustration, see May and May (2011); for the influence of contemporary painting on his treatments of classical subject matter around 1900, see Frederick (2011, 95–98).

Pyle's illustration in no way suggests a child audience. (This lack of evident orientation to children was not uncommon in illustrations of that period, even in editions of Hawthorne's myth books that were published separately and marketed specifically for children.) He adopts a classicizing style that looks back to European traditions of mythical and historical painting. Theseus is a heroic nude, with a head like that of a classical statue, locked in close combat with the Minotaur. The Minotaur is hard to make out in this nighttime setting, but his pose, his small and not conspicuously bullish head, and the heavily muscled arms with which he grabs Theseus indicate a similar and formidable opponent. The illustration depicts a scene of greater suspense and more equal confrontation than the words from the text quoted in the caption: "Theseus ... caught the monster off his guard".

It might seem at first glance, that – as often happened during that period, especially with illustrations by prominent artists – Pyle has simply ignored Hawthorne's text, depicting the myth as he knows it from other sources and ignoring Hawthorne's child-friendly revision. But he actually illustrates quite closely the adult's vision that Hawthorne includes while also consigning it to the background of his story (and to the future consciousness of his readers). Pyle has transposed the Minotaur from the artful puzzle-like Labyrinth in which Minos confined him and has placed him in what is, according to Hawthorne, his spiritual home: "If he were suffered to exist at all, it should have been on some desert island, or in the duskiness of some deep cavern, where nobody would ever be tormented by his abominable aspect" (Hawthorne 1982, 1324). Positioning the Minotaur in the shadows of a deep cavern and importing the chiaroscuro effects of painting into book illustration, Pyle manages at once to depict the monster and to fulfill Hawthorne's claim that he would best not be seen.

The moon whose light makes Theseus the more visible figure and signals his coming victory also represents a visual reworking of Hawthorne's text, where the moon is obscured as Theseus enters the Labyrinth and reappears only after the battle: "So now the battle was ended. Immediately the moon shone out brightly as if all the troubles of the world, and all the wickedness and the ugliness that infest human life, were past and gone forever" (1335). Pyle's already-shining moon naturalizes and dramatizes Hawthorne's spiritual allegory of human evil overcome by reason and self-sacrifice. By making the Minotaur an image of distorted but recognizable humanity rather than the silly figure dancing in pain whom Theseus later laughs at, Pyle illustrates the being that Hawthorne predicts his child readers will one day see, but that is already visible to the adult author and his adult readers: a manifestation of mythical monstrosity in its original form, before the sunshine has been thrown in and the voracious, child-devouring embodiment of human hostility and spiritual pain has been reduced to a comical spectacle.

In the period since Pyle's work, illustrations in children's books have become more overtly child-directed, whether through especially bright color palettes,

elements of jokiness and caricature, or allusions to children’s experiences. In two examples from the second half of the twentieth century, illustrators of versions of the Minotaur myth other than Hawthorne’s nonetheless adopt his strategy of turning troublesome features of the myth into playthings. Marcia Williams’ 1991 recasting of this myth as a cartoon for children literalizes the idea of the Labyrinth as a “mizmaze”, making it a familiar kind of children’s puzzle (cf. Fig. 2).

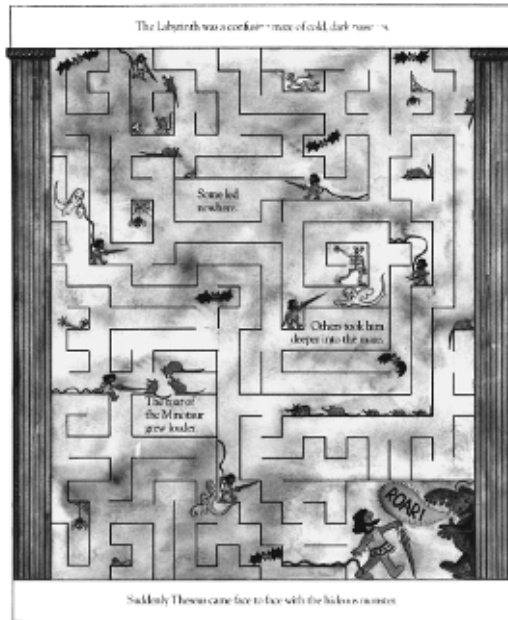


Fig. 2: Marcia Williams, *Suddenly Theseus came face to face with the hideous monster*, illustration from her *Greek Myths for Young Children*, Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press, 1991, [n.p.].

The baggy furry Minotaur that Theseus meets when he completes the puzzle is also reminiscent of a stuffed animal, and his fantastical green monster’s fangs are at least as prominent as his bull’s horns.

Even more striking in this respect is an image that appears in the influential collection that has dominated the American market for the last half century, *D’Aulaires’ Book of Greek Myths* by Ingri and Edgar Parin D’Aulaire, first published in 1962. While the text is by the D’Aulaires themselves, their images often literalize Hawthorne’s metaphors for the conversion of myth into suitable material for children. They throw in a great deal of “blessed sunshine”, not only on their cover, which shows Phaëthon driving the chariot of the sun, but throughout the volume. When they tell the story of the Minotaur, they include a detail that constitutes one of the most “adult” episodes in Greek mythology, the conception

of the Minotaur through sexual intercourse between the human queen Pasiphaë and a bull, facilitated by the hollow cow built by Daedalus in which she hides herself. This event is not even hinted at in most myth books for children and, in their text, the D'Aulaires have inevitably modified it: “[Pasiphaë] admired the bull so much that she ordered Daedalus to construct a hollow wooden cow, so she could hide inside it and enjoy the beauty of the bull at close range” (148). And in their illustration, they further sanitize the episode by reconceiving its figures as toys: the bull has become a stuffed animal, the cow has become a pull toy, and Pasiphaë a little doll (cf. Fig. 3).¹⁵



Fig. 3: Ingri and Edgar Parin D'Aulaire, *Pasiphaë Admiring the Bull*, from their *D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths*, New York: Delacorte Press, 1962, 148.

Here a pair of Hawthorne's most distinguished successors, working a century after his path-breaking collections, meet in their own way the challenge that he articulated for himself in the "Introduction" to *Tanglewood Tales*: to take material that is "abhorrent" and "hideous" and make it the stuff of children's playthings.

¹⁵ In their depiction of the cow as a toy, the D'Aulaires have exploited a feature found in some ancient versions of the myth, where the cow is mounted by Daedalus on a wheeled platform. See Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 3.1.4 and the fresco depicting Pasiphaë and Daedalus in the House of the Vettii in Pompeii. On the presence of toy-like figures in other books illustrated by the D'Aulaires, see Mahoney and Mitchell (1940, 262); Marcus (1980, 19).

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DEBORAH H. ROBERTS with SHEILA MURNAGHAN

Picturing Duality: The Minotaur as Beast and Human in Illustrated Myth Collections for Children

“Daedalus ut clausit conceptum crimine matris
semibovemque virum semivirumque bovem...”

“When Daedalus had enclosed – conceived from its mother’s crime –
the half-bull man, the half-man bull...”
Ovid, *Ars amatoria*

A man who is half bull and a bull who is half man: Ovid’s description of the Minotaur in *Ars amatoria*¹ links the complex duality of the Minotaur – who is not simply half and half, but man and bull at once – to his disturbing origin in an act of doubly transgressive sexuality, both adultery and bestiality: Pasiphaë’s union with the bull of Poseidon.² Longstanding assumptions about what child readers should or should not be exposed to have meant that the creature’s problematic parentage is almost always omitted in retellings of the myth for children.³ But even without any mention of its origin the Minotaur’s duality remains particularly uncanny – in comparison with the hybridity of other part-human creatures in ancient Greek myth – because in this case it is the head that is animal and the body that is human.⁴ The part that is in humans the locus of the capacity for language – long regarded as quintessentially human – thus belongs

¹ Ovid, *Ars amatoria* 2.23–24, translation mine (D. H. R.).

² The Minotaur thus exemplifies what Jeffrey Jerome Cohen describes as the persistent association of monsters with forbidden sexual practices and “illicit mingling” (Cohen 1996b, 14–15).

³ See Sheila Murnaghan’s preceding chapter and Murnaghan and Roberts (2018b, 122–123).

⁴ In other hybrids, such as centaurs, satyrs, and sirens, the human head is standard, though there are exceptions, as for example in a fifth-century statuette of a goat-headed Pan from the Sanctuary of Artemis in Luso, Arcadia, in the collection of the Altes Museum in Berlin. On hybridity as a common indicator of monstrosity though not a “constitutive” one, see Mittman with Dendle (2013, 7), and the many examples in the chapters in that volume.

to the animal half, and most depictions of the Minotaur show a human body but offer no human face in which viewers can see themselves reflected.

The combination of bull's head and human body seems to have been established in Greece as early as the eighth century BCE; it is suggested by a fragment of the poet Hesiod and appears in an eighth-century figurine and in several seventh-century depictions of Theseus killing the Minotaur.⁵ Centuries later, the compendium of myth attributed to Apollodorus (*Bibliotheca* 3.1.4) gives it as the received version: “[...] the Minotaur had the face of a bull, but the rest was a man’s”.⁶ Some ancient sources, including a fragment of Euripides quoted in Plutarch’s *Lives* (*Theseus* 15.2) and a line in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (8.169), simply emphasize the bull-human mixture without specifying which part is which, and there are depictions both in ancient art and (more commonly) in the medieval and early modern European tradition of centaur-like Minotaurs with human heads and torsos.⁷ The later reception of the myth (including the retelling in Bulfinch’s influential 1855 *Age of Fable* and Steele Savage’s illustration in Edith Hamilton’s 1940 *Mythology*) occasionally includes Minotaurs of this kind.⁸ But the bull-headed monster – with variations⁹ – remains predominant in the reception of the story of Theseus both for adults and for children.

Nathaniel Hawthorne’s retelling of this myth in *Tanglewood Tales* (1853, discussed in the previous chapter of this volume by Sheila Murnaghan) is unusual among versions for children in its exploration of what it might mean to be both beast and human. Hawthorne’s complex reading of hybridity suggests the “ontological liminality” Jeffrey Jerome Cohen sees as characteristic of monsters (1996b, 6):¹⁰ the Minotaur’s roar includes “something like the words of human language, but all disjointed and shaken to pieces by passing through the gullet of

⁵ See Hesiod fr. 93 (ed. Most 2007); on early depictions in the visual arts see Schefold (1993, 115–118); see also Ward et al. (1970, 28–29). On the ancient sources for the Minotaur story, see Gantz (1993, 260–268), and on its sources and later reception, Curley (1988, 193–205).

⁶ The collection known as the *Bibliotheca* (*Library*) is probably to be dated to the first or second century CE.

⁷ See for example the seventh-century relief amphora in Basel’s Antikenmuseum (Schefold 1993, 117), and for medieval and early modern examples see Bord (1976, 39, 45, 82); Ward et al. (1970, 206–207).

⁸ Bulfinch (1855, 152); Hamilton (1940, 213); cf. Savage’s illustration for another 1940 collection, Sally Benson’s *Stories of the Gods and Heroes* (1940, 177). Hamilton’s text is ambiguous; Benson’s in this as in other respects follows Bulfinch.

⁹ Some illustrators, for example, take “half bull, half human” quite literally, as in Robert Baxter’s illustration in Naden (1981, 18 and 24); cf. Anthony Lewis’ depiction of a Minotaur who has a bull’s head and a human torso but is an upright bipedal bull from the waist down (Coats 2002, 54).

¹⁰ On such liminality in Greek mythological monsters see Felton (2016, 104).

a miserably enraged brute” (Hawthorne 1982, 1334), and his shifting appearance challenges any neat division:¹¹

Only his horned head belonged to a bull; and yet, somehow or other, he looked like a bull all over, preposterously waddling on his hind-legs; or, if you happened to view in him another way, he seemed wholly a man, and all the more monstrous for being so. (Hawthorne 1982, 1333)

It is hard to imagine how an illustrator would picture (save by some kind of optical illusion or feat of animation) what Hawthorne describes here, but Hawthorne’s account of the hybrid Minotaur as somehow all bull, all man, and “all the more monstrous” points to both the challenge this creature poses to illustrators and the choices they have made.

The Minotaur is one of the most frequently depicted of mythical figures throughout the tradition of retellings of myth for children.¹² As always with illustrated storybooks, some illustrations follow the text closely; in others the visual narrative fills a gap in the verbal narrative and thus supplements the text; in still others, the visual image is at odds with the text, either in its particulars or in the mood it conveys: pathetic where the text is triumphal, for example, or comical where the text is dramatic.¹³ But where writers may elide the question of how exactly the monster’s two parts are related, the many artists who have illustrated these retellings have had to decide not only how frightening to make the Minotaur but also how to represent, combine, and balance his human and animal characteristics and where to draw or blur the line between the two halves.

In this chapter, with a focus primarily on the illustrations themselves, I consider depictions of the Minotaur in British and American myth collections for children from the 1850s – the decade in which myth was established as suitable for children’s stories – to the present day.¹⁴ I am not primarily concerned with patterns of chronological change. There are of course shifts in style of representation, in points of cultural reference, and in implied viewer: in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, illustrations are for the most part heroic scenes similar in style to illustrations for adults, and sometimes evocative of particular paintings or sculptures of the Minotaur, whereas illustrations from the

¹¹ On Hawthorne’s treatment of the Minotaur see Murnaghan in this volume (65–72), and Murnaghan and Roberts (2018b, 37).

¹² On the importance of illustration in the reception of myth for children, see Murnaghan and Roberts (2018b, chs. 2 and 3).

¹³ For a survey of types of interaction between the verbal and the visual in picture books, see Lewis (2001, ch. 2); on “bitextuality” and different relationships between image and text in the illustrated book, see Kooistra (1995, esp. ch. 1).

¹⁴ For a discussion of images of the Minotaur in relation to the text in certain editions of Charles Kingsley’s *The Heroes*, and in the work of Andrew Lang and Padraic Colum, see Murnaghan and Roberts (2018b, 69–80, 90–91, 98–99).

middle of the twentieth century on more often imply a younger viewer, and are increasingly likely to invoke cartoons and other images from popular culture.¹⁵ But throughout this period we find a remarkable persistence in the range of responses to the challenge of depicting the Minotaur's duality or hybridity.

In what follows, I describe three prominent strategies of representation, which have the effect – differently realized in each case – of diminishing or mitigating the disturbing impact of the Minotaur's duality. In the first, the illustration enhances the Minotaur's monstrosity and thus distracts attention from his duality; the second likewise downplays duality but in favor of a more uniform animality, while the third uses the Minotaur's duality to evoke by indirection both the creature's humanness and the reader's sense of humanity, and in this way discounts the duality it otherwise underscores. There are, of course, other types, and there are illustrations that combine elements of these types, but all three of these recur regularly over the period we are looking at here.

Minotaur as Multiplex and Monster

In what we might find a surprising move, both text and image in children's anthologies often seek to add frightening elements to the already horrific image of the Minotaur, or to make him resemble other frightening beings. Hawthorne's British contemporary Charles Kingsley, a fellow-pioneer in the transformation of myth into pleasure reading for the young, includes in his 1855 collection, *The Heroes; or, Greek Fairy Tales for My Children*, an addition to the Minotaur's usual physical make-up that becomes something of a fixture in the later tradition for children: "His body was a man's: but his head was the head of a bull; and his teeth were the teeth of a lion; and with them he tore his prey" (1859, 249). These teeth no doubt enhance the Minotaur's monstrosity, but they also subsume duality in multiplicity – this creature is bull and man *and* lion – thus effacing the issue of the Minotaur's double origin and giving him what adults might see as a kind of acceptable scariness for child readers. In his 1921 retelling of the myth, in *The Golden Fleece and the Heroes Who Lived before Achilles*, Padraic Colum too goes beyond the man/bull dichotomy: his Minotaur rears like a horse, has dragon claws, and sheds slime instead of blood (215). Numerous illustrators pursue a similar tactic, with or without a basis in the accompanying text. Willy Pogany's elegant line drawing for Colum's version (cf. Fig. 1, next page) gives the Minotaur not only the claws Colum describes but a predator's sharp teeth.¹⁶

¹⁵ On illustration in retellings of myth, see Murnaghan and Roberts (2018a, chs. 2 and 3); cf. also Murnaghan and Roberts (2017) and (2018b).

¹⁶ See illustrations by H. M. Brock (Kingsley 1928, facing 204) and by Nick Harris (Oldfield 1988, 47).



Fig. 1: Willy Pogany, *Theseus and the Minotaur*, illustration from Padraic Colum, *The Golden Fleece and the Heroes Who Lived before Achilles*, New York: Macmillan, 1921, facing 215.



Fig. 2: Elenore Plaisted Abbott and Helen Alden Knipe, *Theseus and the Minotaur*, illustration from Nathaniel Hawthorne, *A Wonder Book and Tanglewood Tales*, Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs, 1911, facing 246.

And in a 1911 edition of Hawthorne's version, Elenore Plaisted Abbott and Helen Alden Knipe (cf. Fig. 2) provide a particularly grandiose vision of the Minotaur with fangs and claws, although neither detail is featured in Hawthorne's version of the story.¹⁷

The huge head of Abbott and Knipe's Minotaur, whose oddly constructed and metallic horns seem to belong to an artificial rather than a natural being, is rendered still more monstrous and less simply animal by its gleaming eyes and by the clouds of steam or smoke emerging from its nostrils. These last two features become recurrent motifs, and here too illustrators sometimes follow the text, and sometimes depart from it or elaborate on it. Eric Kimmel's Minotaur (*The McElderry Book of Greek Myths*, 2008) has glowing eyes and "hot breath", but Kimmel's illustrator, Pep Montserrat, makes the creature more strikingly supernatural by giving him bright red eyes and having him breathe flames (cf. Fig. 3, next page).¹⁸ This last element may owe something to the fire-breathing oxen of Apollonius of Rhodes' third-century BCE epic *Argonautica*, but to most

¹⁷ See James Barry's illustration in Witting (1965, 97) and Harris' illustration in Oldfield (1988, 47).

¹⁸ See illustrations by Linda Cavallini (Punter 2011, 82) and Linda Edwards (Amery 1999, 118).

readers (and certainly to children) it is more likely to suggest the dragons of the later European tradition – earlier recalled by Colum’s “dragon claws”.



Fig. 3: Pep Montserrat, *Theseus and the Minotaur*, illustration from Eric Kimmel, *The McElderry Book of Greek Myths*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008, 82 (illustration copyright © 2008 Pep Montserrat. Reprinted with the permission of Margaret K. McElderry, an imprint of Simon & Schuster Children’s Publishing Division. All rights reserved).



Fig. 4: Joan Kiddell-Monroe, *The Minotaur and His Victims*, illustration from Robert Graves, *Myths of Ancient Greece Retold for Young People*, London: Cassell, 1961, 75.

We find this evocation of what adults might regard as a less disturbing (if no less scary) denizen of legend and fairy tale anticipated in the text of an 1896 retelling of Greek myth for kindergarten children (Helen Beckwith’s *In Mythland*), which actually replaces the Minotaur with a dragon:

As they went from room to room he unwound the thread.
 All at once they heard a roar.
 It was the dragon.
 How large and fierce it was.
 It sprang at them.
 But Theseus drew his sword.
 He struck two sharp blows.
 It fell to the ground.
 It lay there quite dead. (Beckwith 1896, 67)

Other archetypes of the frightening to which illustrators assimilate the Minotaur include giants – the Minotaur is often described or depicted as much taller than

Theseus – and devils.¹⁹ The iconography of the devil is itself both varied and complex, with images in western art drawing body parts from different sources and sometimes displacing them as well (head in stomach, wings on legs) to illustrate unnaturalness.²⁰ But the devil's most consistent traits – reminiscent of, and perhaps in part derived from ancient images of Pan, with whom the devil may also share hairy legs or hooves – include conspicuous horns, long ears, and a tail (Muchembled 2004, 17). An artist's deployment of these may make of the Minotaur a strikingly devilish being, as for example in Joan Kiddell-Monroe's drawing (cf. Fig. 4) for Robert Graves' *Myths of Ancient Greece Retold for Young People* (1961). Although Graves' narrative describes Theseus as coming upon the sleeping Minotaur and decapitating it without any preliminary combat, Kiddell-Monroe (whose illustration is on the chapter's title page) shows the Minotaur very much awake, watching the latest group of frightened victims with arms threateningly outspread; his horns, long ears, tail, and hairy legs are reminiscent both of the devil and of Pan.²¹

I am not suggesting that children will pick up on all the iconographic allusions these illustrators incorporate, or that these images make the Minotaur any less frightening; my argument is rather that by exaggerating the creature's supernatural monstrosity and by drawing on multiple sources or archetypal modes of scariness these illustrations work to distract the reader from the disquieting presence of animal head on human body and from the double origin rarely addressed in myth collections for children. In some of the most recent illustrations we see new versions of the multiplex monster, representing new types of acceptable scariness. In the 1985 *Usborne Illustrated Guide to Greek Myths and Legends*, for example, where the text simply describes the Minotaur as having the head and shoulders of a bull and the body of a man, Rodney Matthews' image is clearly inspired by the creatures, more alien than animal, that inhabit science fiction films and video games (cf. Fig. 5, next page). In addition to horns, fangs, glowing red eyes, and claws, this Minotaur has the pincers and antennae of a monstrous insect, and his vaguely classical clothing resembles reptilian skin.

¹⁹ For a giant-like Minotaur, see especially Rex Warner's *Men and Gods* with Edward Gorey's illustration (1959, 143–144).

²⁰ On the iconography of the devil, see Hundsichler (2011); Makhov (2011); Muchembled (2004); and Szakács (2011); specifically on the devil as unnatural, see Makhov (2011).

²¹ Cf. Salomon van Abbé's Minotaur (Hawthorne 1950, facing 42). Van Abbé's illustration is very closely modeled on a small bronze *Theseus* (1843) by Antoine-Louis Barye, but by elongating the Minotaur's horns and giving him a prehensile tail van Abbé has transformed him into an eerie and demonic figure.



Fig. 5: Rodney Matthews, *Theseus and the Minotaur*, illustration from Cheryl Evans and Anne Millard, *Usborne Illustrated Guide to Greek Myths and Legends*, London: Ushborne, 2003, 35.



Fig. 6: Raffaello Bussoni, ... *the Minotaur ... with a terrifying bellow ... charged*, illustration from Nicola Ann Sissons, *Myths and Legends of the Greeks*, New York: Hart, 1960, 73.

Minotaur as Fully (and thus Merely) Animal

If images such as those discussed so far subsume duality in multiplicity and monstrosity, and thus render the Minotaur frightening in ways adults presume acceptable for children, other illustrations efface his duality by making the human half more bull-like. The Minotaur's body is often pictured as particularly broad and muscular, as in Raffaello Busoni's illustration (cf. Fig. 6) for Nicola Ann Sissons' *Myths and Legends of the Greeks* (1960); his posture may also be bull-like, especially when he moves like a bull, as here, in keeping with Sissons' text: "Then the Minotaur lowered his head, and with a terrifying bellow, he charged" (Sissons, 72–73).²²

The contrast with Theseus in such scenes of battle, where the hero is typically pictured as slender though strongly built, further underscores the difference between the truly human body and the Minotaur's body, which may also be

²² See also illustrations by Federico Castelloni (Kingsley 1964, 39) and Willy Pogany (Hawthorne 1909, 11 and 45).

rendered more animal-like by having hair or fur (usually brown, though sometimes white), a tail, and hooves in place of hands or feet.²³

The bull-like Minotaur may still be frightening, of course; in Alice and Martin Provensens' 1959 illustration for the *Golden Treasury of Myths and Legends* by Anne Terry White, he is a looming presence, with massive shoulders, hair all down his back, and a clearly visible tail (cf. Fig. 7).



Fig. 7: Alice and Martin Provensens, *The Minotaur*, illustration from Anne Terry White, *The Golden Treasury of Myths and Legends*, New York: Golden Press, 1959, 58–59.

But the encroachment of the bull on the human half may also be used to comic effect, and some of the most fully animal Minotaurs are at the same time almost figures of fun. A 1963 edition of Hawthorne, with illustrations by Harold Jones, gives us a Minotaur who is entirely bull-like except from the knees down; his awkwardly upright posture, extended front hooves, and bovine face that is as alarmed as it is alarming, make him simultaneously ghastly and comical (cf. Fig. 8, next page).

²³ See for example illustrations by Baxter (Naden 1981, 18; 24); Emma Chichester Clark (McCaughrean 1992, 64); Anthony Lewis (Coats 2002, 54); Frederick Richardson (Hawthorne 1930, 215); M. H. Squire and Ethel Mars (Kingsley 1901, 181).



Fig. 8: Harold Jones, *Theseus and the Minotaur*, illustration from Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Complete Greek Stories of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, from the *Wonder Book and Tanglewood Tales*, Philadelphia: John C. Winston, 1963, 176.



Fig. 9: T. H. Robinson, *Theseus and the Minotaur*, illustration from Charles Kingsley, *The Heroes; or, Greek Fairy Tales for My Children*, London and New York: Ernest Nister and E. P. Dutton, [1903], 285.

Jones seems here to pick up on, though not to represent directly, the balance of monstrous and comedic elements in Hawthorne's text, where the Minotaur gallops around in a ridiculous way, and cuts "a great caper in the air" shortly before losing his head and falling down flat upon the ground.²⁴

Minotaur as Human

If the illustrations in this second group approximate the first of Hawthorne's shifting perspectives – the Minotaur who "seems like a bull all over", we might then ask whether we also find depictions in which he seems "wholly a man". Are there instances in which the illustrator seems strikingly to humanize the Minotaur, and if so, by what means and to what effect? There are certainly many images, throughout our period, in which everything except the head seems fully human, with no animal characteristics or monstrous additions. The bodies in

²⁴ Cf. the awkward four-hooved Minotaur in Richardson's illustration (Hawthorne 1930, 215). For a discussion of a more fully comical type of Minotaur, toy-like and drawn as cartoon, see Murnaghan in this volume (72).

these tend not only to be human in configuration, but to realize their humanness in their posture and their gait; in T. H. Robinson's 1903 illustration for Kingsley's *The Heroes* (cf. Fig. 9), for example, the Minotaur runs towards Theseus as a man might run, in clear contrast with the bull-like charge in Fig. 6 above.

Other Minotaurs whose bodies are markedly human sit like humans, as in Tim Stevens' illustration (cf. Fig. 10) for a retelling by Anthony Horowitz or lie sleeping as a human would, as in the D'Aulaires' version (cf. Fig. 11), familiar to generations of American readers.



Fig. 10: Tim Stevens, *The Minotaur*, illustration from Anthony Horowitz, *Myths and Legends*, London: Kingfisher, 2003 (first publ. 1985), 132.

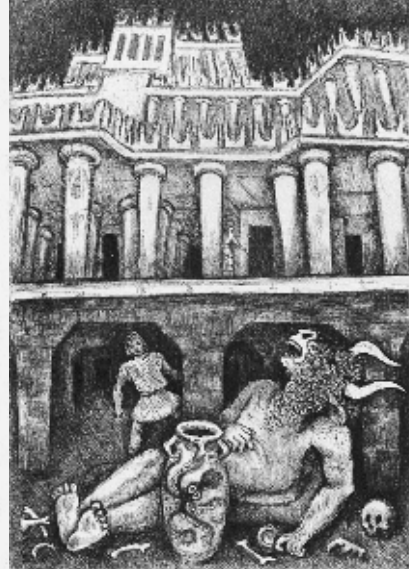


Fig. 11: Ingri and Edgar Parin D'Aulaire, *Theseus and the Minotaur*, illustration from their *Book of Greek Myths*, New York: Doubleday, 1962, 151.

Does the full humanness of a Minotaur's body mean that the head too somehow takes on a kind of humanness? That is, does the creature's human nature here encroach on his animal head in the way that elsewhere (as we have seen) his animal nature encroaches on his human body? Not in any instance I have found. We do, however, find a somewhat paradoxical effect in which illustrators undercut the Minotaur's duality and emphasize his humanness by bringing out the division between human body and bull's head. In Meredith Hamilton's illustration (cf. Fig. 12, next page) for Heather Alexander's 2011 retelling, for example, the head seems so detached from the body, so sharply distinguishable from it, that it is hard not to see the head as something superimposed.



Fig. 12: Meredith Hamilton, *Theseus and the Minotaur*, illustration from Heather Alexander, *A Child's Introduction to Greek Mythology*, New York: Black Dog and Leventhal, 2011, 92.

In such images, it is almost as if a human being were wearing an animal mask, or were under a temporary enchantment, like Bottom with the ass's head in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or had been permanently transformed by this alien appendage, like Ovid's Scylla, who finds dog's heads growing from her body (*Metamorphoses* 14.58–67). The first two can be seen as playful or transitory where the third is horrific, but in all three cases we are asked to respond to the subject as human.

We might expect that humanness would be signaled not only by build, posture, and movement, but by clothing, as in the representation of myriads of anthropomorphic animal characters in children's stories – some of whom (like Beatrix Potter's Peter Rabbit and Jemima Puddle-Duck) are animals equipped with a few items of apparel,²⁵ while others (like Rupert Bear) might almost be fully-dressed humans with animal heads. It is true that many Minotaurs have clothes of some kind; for one thing, the proprieties of children's books require that the illustrator at least partially dress the body (loin cloths and random drapery are common, cf. Fig. 9), carefully angle it to avoid any untoward exposure (cf. Figs. 1 and 4), or provide a handily placed object to obscure the view (cf. Fig. 11). But there is little correlation in these illustrations between dress and humanness; several of the most bull-like Minotaurs are also clothed, though typically in a somewhat rudimentary fashion (cf. Fig. 6), which may make it hard to distinguish clothing from fur, or to tell whether a tail belongs to the animal or

²⁵ On the significance of clothing in Beatrix Potter's work, see Scott (1994).

to his clothing.²⁶ What is more, some of the most fully dressed Minotaurs in children's anthologies are among the most monstrous and inhuman (cf. Figs. 3 and 5).

Somewhat surprisingly, then, given the child audience, the naked human body is the principal sign of the Minotaur's humanness and the principal means by which illustrators evoke the reader's response to the Minotaur as human. They do so by emphasizing the Minotaur's likeness to the human being he confronts; by drawing the reader's attention to features that – in the absence of a human face – provide an alternative expression of human experience and response; and by thus introducing an element of pathos that, without making Minotaur look like a *completely* human being, asks readers to pity him as we would pity a human being, sometimes in clear opposition to the text.

As I noted above, many illustrations suggest a stark contrast between Theseus and the monster with whom he battles: Theseus tends to be slender, sometimes boyish, where the Minotaur is bulky; upright where the Minotaur is crouching; pale where the Minotaur is dark and hairy. But others reduce that contrast, and draw our attention to the likeness between the Minotaur's human half and the man who is engaged in a death struggle with him. In George Wharton Edwards' 1888 frontispiece for Hawthorne's *Tanglewood Tales* (cf. Fig. 13, next page), Theseus holds his sword to the Minotaur's throat; the creature's head is grotesquely, even comically bovine, with big cow eyes, but the combatants' muscular limbs, entwined below, would be hard to tell apart,²⁷ as would their hands and feet.

We find the same likeness over a century later (cf. Fig. 12) in Meredith Hamilton's illustration, discussed above. Hamilton is working in a very different stylistic idiom, clearly directed at children as Edwards' is not: here too, however, the combatants are distinguished by their heads – youthful human, large bull – but linked by their limbs and especially by their hands and feet.²⁸

²⁶ See illustrations by Frederick Richardson (Hawthorne 1930, 215) and George Soper (Kingsley 1910, 242).

²⁷ Edwards responds to Hawthorne's complex treatment of the Minotaur by running through a series of variations: the scenario in the book's frontispiece is repeated on the cover (in gold), but there the Minotaur's head, while still grotesque, is subtly different, more frightening than absurd: his ears are long and pointed rather than round and bovine, his hair is shaggy, and his mouth is open in a toothy grimace. Finally, at the beginning of the story, in a vignette that incorporates the title, a Minotaur who is not only very human but decidedly modern sits at rest, one leg crossed over the other, on a stone bench wreathed with ivy, and holds his left hand up as if to wave to the reader.

²⁸ Cf. also Helen H. Kihn's illustration for a 1930 edition of Kingsley's *The Heroes* in a stylized mode indebted to art deco (Kingsley 1930, 231); Kihn again intertwines the Minotaur's limbs with those of Theseus; their shared hue, stark white against the

Hands in particular have a combination of likeness and expressive power that compensates for or takes the place of the human face the Minotaur lacks. Readers cannot see themselves in the bull's countenance, nor do the bull's features lend themselves to the expression of human emotion. But the Minotaur's human hands may grasp desperately at the victorious Theseus in a struggle for life and what sometimes seems an act of supplication (cf. Figs. 12 and 13); they may support the failing Minotaur, as in Rose Le Quesne's illustration (cf. Fig. 14) for a simplified edition of Kingsley's *The Heroes*²⁹ and they may lie open or relaxed in death (cf. Fig. 15, next page).



Fig. 13: George Wharton Edwards, *Theseus and the Minotaur*, illustration from Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Tanglewood Tales for Girls and Boys*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1888, frontispiece.



Fig. 14: Rose Le Quesne, *Theseus and the Minotaur*, illustration from Charles Kingsley, *The Heroes*, told to the children by Mary MacGregor, London and New York: T. C. and E. C. Jack and E. P. Dutton, [1905], facing 114.

The portrayal of the hands thus contributes to the creation of a scene of pathos rather than one of horror and so to the evocation in the reader of the kind of pity we might be expected to feel for a human being. In such illustrations the Minotaur's human body still has a bull's head, but this head is less likely to be monstrous, and more likely to be simply cow-like. His posture is often not just human, but pitifully human: he lies sleeping; he sits, emaciated and exhausted; his weariness is reflected in his bent back, his bare and vulnerable feet, his

black background, suggests their shared humanity even as it brings them together as compositional elements.

²⁹ Cf. Arthur Rackham's very similar depiction of the Minotaur (Niebuhr 1903, 95), which may have been Le Quesne's model.

grasping hands. Many of these pitiable Minotaurs are dead or on the point of death.³⁰

It is striking that in some instances the illustrator chooses to bring out the pathos of the Minotaur's plight in contrast with the horror or triumphalism of the text. In his 1855 anthology *The Heroes*, as we noted above, Kingsley describes a "strange" and monstrous Minotaur, whose "teeth were the teeth of a lion, and with them he tore his prey". This Minotaur also suffers a particularly violent death: Theseus pursues him, stabbing him "again and again from behind" as the monster bellows, until "at last Theseus came up with him, where he lay panting on a slab among the snow, and caught him by the horns, and forced his head back, and drove the keen sword through his throat" (Kingsley 1859, 249–250).

Kingsley's own illustration (cf. Fig. 15), however, shows neither the violence of the death nor the monstrosity of the Minotaur; indeed, he represents a moment not actually touched on in the narrative itself.³¹



Fig. 15: Charles Kingsley, *Theseus and the Minotaur*, illustration from his *The Heroes; or, Greek Fairy Tales for My Children*, 2nd ed., Cambridge and London: Macmillan, 1859, facing 250.

Theseus stands with one foot on his defeated enemy; the pose is triumphal, but the hero's expression is meditative, even sorrowful. The Minotaur's head is merely bovine, with no sign of the text's sharp teeth, just a protruding tongue; his body, though somewhat hairy, is otherwise fully human, and his slender human hands dangle pathetically from the rocky cliff's edge.³²

³⁰ See (in addition to Fig. 15) illustrations by Frederick Richardson (Forbush 1928, 233) and Katharine Pyle (1928, facing 238).

³¹ See Hodnett (1982, 6–10) on the "moment of choice" in illustration.

³² For a discussion of this illustration and others in relation to Kingsley's text, see Murnaghan and Roberts (2018b, 69–71).

Horowitz's 1985 retelling of the Minotaur story (clearly aimed at older children or young adults and one of the few that include the story of the Minotaur's birth)³³ presents a Minotaur who is particularly repellent as well as frightening:

The Minotaur was horrible, far more horrible than he could ever have imagined. It was about the size of a man, but a large man. Stark naked it stood before him, its fists clenched, its legs slightly apart. The creature was filthy – with dirt and with dried blood. A blue moss clung to one side of its body like rust. Despite the chill, sweat dripped from its shoulders, glistening on its skin.

It was human as far as the neck. Its head was that of a bull [...] and grotesquely disproportionate to the rest of the body. So heavy was the head that its human neck was straining to support it, a pulse thudding next to its throat. Two horns curved out of its head above a pair of orange eyes. Saliva frothed around its muzzle and splashed onto the stone floor. Its teeth were not those of a bull but of a lion, jutting out of its mouth and gnashing constantly as if the creature were trying to make them fit more comfortably. The whole head was covered with white hair. It carried a piece of twisted iron, holding it like a club. (142)

The anthology in which this retelling appears was provided with new illustrations for the 2003 edition, and Stevens' vignette just above the title of the story (cf. Fig. 10 above) gives a very different impression from the narrative that follows.³⁴ Some of the details are clearly derived from the text: the Minotaur is visibly slavering, and in his right hand he holds a twisted length of metal. But his head is simply that of a bull, with a bull's neck supporting it, and the lion's teeth are nowhere in evidence; the human body does not seem either mossy or blood-encrusted. Furthermore, rather than show the creature attacking with iron bar or lowered horns, Stevens (like Kingsley) has chosen a moment not mentioned in the narrative. The Minotaur sits or squats in human fashion, with bent shoulders; his left hand reaches out to a nearby wall, apparently in search of support for his gaunt body. The reader cannot know exactly where we are in the story; the Minotaur may be waiting for more prey, but his posture seems more defensive than predatory. If he is ungainly and grotesque, he is also pathetic in his isolation and the apparent frailty or sickliness of his human physique.

³³ “[...] not knowing what she was doing, the queen stole away one stormy night to the stables and it was from this unnatural union that the Minotaur was born” (Horowitz 2003, 133).

³⁴ Stevens' illustration forms a striking contrast with Lee Montgomery's back cover image of the Minotaur, which combines elements of our first two types – the lion's teeth, the reddish eyes, and the broad-shouldered, bull-like, hulking body.

Conclusions

Our first group of illustrators, then, presents child readers with a Minotaur whose monstrosity elides his disturbing duality; our second reduces this duality by making the Minotaur essentially an animal; our third, sometimes working against or beyond the accompanying text, asks children to see the Minotaur, in spite of his duality, as significantly if not simply human, both in his likeness to human beings and as an object of pity. In comparison with the other two, these humanizing illustrations seem less concerned to produce an image that will meet adult standards for acceptable scariness or child-friendliness; rather than seek fully to distract young readers from a disturbing duality they focus on the humanness that makes up one part of that duality.

In their evocation of sympathy for the monster, such visual portrayals – which may be found throughout the past century and a half – might be taken to anticipate or reflect a contemporary phenomenon. In recent decades (which have seen revisionist readings of many vilified literary figures, from Grendel to Mr. Rochester’s first wife, and in which monsters have been reconceived in popular culture as friendly and amusing creatures), the Minotaur has found rehabilitation in a variety of narratives.³⁵ He may be a ferocious enemy in the Percy Jackson series, but in other works he appears as an amiable, often admirable individual, who is misunderstood and unjustly stigmatized. In some of these (Kate McMullan’s jokey *Stop that Bull, Theseus*, 2003; and Phillip W. Simpson’s more serious *Minotaur*, 2015) we are given what purports to be “the true story” of the Minotaur; in others (James Christensen’s *Voyage of the Basset*, 1996; and Tobias Druitt’s Corydon trilogy, 2005–2007) the author is not retelling the ancient myth in its traditional form but inventing a situation in which figures from mythology come into contact with fictional children. Stories like these realize more fully the impulse in our third group of illustrations to respond to the Minotaur as human. They do so, however, not by refocusing the reader’s attention and complicating the reader’s response, but by reducing the Minotaur’s monstrosity to physical difference and making him a nice guy.

Our last group of illustrations, in contrast, evokes the Minotaur’s suffering humanity in the context of a story in which he is anything but amiable; these images might be said to offer a visual analogue to Hawthorne’s implicit invitation to his young readers to feel, as his Theseus does, “some sort of pity” for the “bull-headed villain”, and to see the Minotaur (when they grow up) as an allegory both for human corruption and for the misery it brings the corrupt.³⁶

³⁵ On twenty-first-century developments in the role and treatment of monsters, see Dendle (2013).

³⁶ On the evocation of this strand of adult consciousness, which the child reader will one day share, in Howard Pyle’s illustration of Hawthorne’s story, see Sheila Murnaghan in this volume (69).

Ah, the bull-headed villain! And, Oh, my good little people, you will perhaps see, one of these days, as I do now, that every human being, who suffers anything evil to get into his nature, or to remain there, is a kind of Minotaur, an enemy of his fellow-creatures, and separated from all good companionship, as this poor monster was! (Hawthorne 1982, 1333).

Thus, whereas the first two groups exemplify the tendency of children's books to address the supposed limitations or needs of children as they are now, this third group reflects what Perry Nodelman has argued is also a defining feature of children's literature – its appeal to children to take on a more sophisticated adult understanding that is implicit or “hidden” in the text, or in its illustrations (Nodelman 2008, esp. 76–81 and 206–210). It is fitting that these illustrations should recall certain very human Minotaurs to be found in the western artistic tradition, whose audience is by implication adult. I am thinking here not so much of the well-known Minotaurs Picasso removes from the original story and situates in scenes of conviviality, sensuality, and pathos, as of more traditional Minotaurs, like this terracotta from the Walters Art Museum (cf. Fig. 16), which shows Theseus subjugating a slender, almost doe-like monster, whose arms, painfully stretched and struggling, align with the hero's arms, and whose hands and feet are as human as the hero's own.



Fig. 16: Anonymous Venetian sculptor, *Theseus and the Minotaur*, terracotta, France, 18th c., The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, No. 27.358.

The story I have told here is not a diachronic one, in which the iconography of the Minotaur shifts to reflect historical developments and changing cultural contexts. It offers instead a typology of the kinds of choices illustrators and authors have made, with remarkable consistency, over the century and a half since myth was established as pleasure reading for children. These choices reflect a truth all students of children's literature must bear in mind: that such literature is

inevitably informed by adult constructions of and desires for the child reader. Our first two groups of illustrators seek to distract the reader from the Minotaur's disturbing hybridity; in doing so they envision the child as a being who must be protected from uncomfortable or dangerous knowledge. Our third group seeks to evoke from the reader a humane response to the pathos of the clearly hybrid Minotaur; in doing so, they envision the child as a being who should be helped to grow into adulthood. The many Minotaurs of children's books reflect not only the range and variety of the western artistic tradition but also the diversity of adult hopes and fears for children.

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LIZ GLOYN

Mazes Intricate: The Minotaur as a Catalyst of Male Identity Formation in British Young Adult Fiction

Classical material is often used to provide the critical space for contemporary subjects to explore their own identities and contexts. This chapter investigates the role that the Minotaur plays in British young adult fiction as a cipher for helping young readers negotiate the complicated maze of modern masculinity.¹ The Minotaur's symbolic representation of manhood derives from its traditional role in myth, but also fits into broader trends in children's literature and modern concerns about boys' social and emotional growth. Classical myth thus functions as one of a group of strategies to consider how identity is formed and what growing up means for British teenagers.

My three case studies are Alan Gibbons' *Shadow of the Minotaur* (2000), Tobias Druitt's *Corydon and the Island of Monsters* (2005), and Charlie Fletcher's *Stoneheart* (2006). These books are aimed at eleven to thirteen-year-olds, who are beginning the transition "from dependent, highly managed and regulated childhood to a more fluid, uncertain and yet more agential (young) adulthood" (Horrell 2012, 47). Like most young adult fiction, the novels offer models of identity for readers to experiment with.² Since they are written by adults, YA novels "are in fact not about what it is to be an adolescent but are about what it might or should be, since, perhaps unconsciously, adults want to instruct young people and guide them into adulthood" (Hilton and Nikolajeva 2012, 8).³ As such, they tend to present readers with a variety of behavioural

¹ I thank Katarzyna Marciniak, the organizers and attendees of the *Chasing Mythical Beasts...* conference for their thoughts on an early draft of this paper, and Deborah H. Roberts for sharing her paper with me. Melissa Terras and Ika Willis offered extremely useful feedback on an earlier draft. Sarah Burton and Adam Roberts helped me with issues of children's literature. Leen Van Broeck gave me time to write this paper by indexing my book (Gloyn 2019).

² Crowe (1998) and Immel (2009) discuss some of the problems that arise from attempts to categorize YA fiction.

³ The instability of adolescence often manifests through the protagonists' sexual exploration in YA novels, although none of my case studies engage with this particular issue.

models, allowing them to adopt different subject positions safely. My three novels centre on an unexpected event marking a kind of initiation which requires the protagonist to understand and survive in a radically altered world.⁴

All three novels offer various models of masculinity for the protagonist to choose between.⁵ They circulate in the midst of the contemporary so-called “crisis of masculinity”, a perception that shifts in gender roles and an increasingly mechanized or service-based economy make it difficult for young men to find their own social place.⁶ The novels speak to this perceived crisis by explicitly offering different visions of what it means to be a contemporary man, thus giving their readers some options to consider as the novel’s protagonist undergoes his own process of discernment and maturation. The models offered fit comfortably within traditional patriarchal structures; for instance, the rapist and the rescuer reappear frequently, as do the symbolic good and bad father. The conservatism of masculinity on offer means that despite an appearance of alternatives, the novels in fact reinforce social conformity.

The target audience of these novels is, as it were, negotiating the maze of puberty, so it is hardly surprising that the Minotaur appears along the way.⁷ Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer identifies four kinds of classical reception in children’s literature: classical fables used as reading for children; the adaptation of myths and epics; historical representations; and the linked motifs of Pan and the *puer aeternus* (2006, 754). Lisa Maurice argues that the two most frequent elements to appear are the world of heroic Greek myth and the history of the Roman Empire (2015, 1). However, my case studies do not engage in straightforward

⁴ In this, they follow the trend for YA novels to focus on a major event which marks a child’s coming of age, or on the struggles experienced in day to day life (Koss and Teale 2009, 567).

⁵ While children’s books statistically tend to have male protagonists (McCabe et al. 2011), and arguably the female reader also learns about male models of behaviour from these discussions, this chapter concentrates on the impact of the male protagonist’s journey on the male reader. This is in part because the books also offer distinct models of femininity for their female characters, in particular the later volumes of the *Stoneheart* trilogy (Fletcher 2007, 2008).

⁶ While masculinity is a historical category and has always been negotiated and fluid, the pressures associated with performing contemporary masculinity are often cited as one of the reasons that the leading cause of death for men between 20 and 34 is suicide; in England and Wales at a rate of nearly four times that of women in the same age cohort in 2014 (Office of National Statistics 2015; see also Powell 2016). Perry (2016) offers a cogent summary of the current pressures around British masculinity and how they manifest.

⁷ Gilman (2008) argues that girls in YA fiction experience labyrinths differently, using Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Tombs of Atuan* (1968) and her own *Cloud & Ashes* (2009) as touchpoints.

retellings of Greek myth.⁸ Instead, they appropriate the figure of the Minotaur and deploy him within their narrative structure for their own purposes, partly stripping him of his mythic context in the process. While the novels' readers are unlikely to be intimately familiar with Greek or Latin, the continuing cultural presence of the ancient world means its mythology is still familiar to them.⁹

The Minotaur was born of Queen Pasiphaë of Crete's desire for a bull that her husband King Minos had promised for sacrifice to Poseidon but kept for himself. Minos had the master craftsman Daedalus build a labyrinth for the Minotaur to live in, and fed him a tribute of fourteen young men and women from Athens until Theseus came as a tribute and slew the Minotaur. Ovid's characterization of the Minotaur as *semibovemque virum semivirumque bovem*, "a man half a bull and a bull half a man" (*Ars amatoria* 2.24) sums up contemporary fascination with the creature's inner conflict between human and bestial impulses.¹⁰ His origins in bestiality provoke horrified and prurient scrutiny, difficult to convey to an adolescent readership (and so discreetly skirted in my target texts).¹¹ Perhaps most famously, Picasso used the beast to explore his own masculinity in his paintings, depicting interactions with women ranging from the intimately romantic to the starkly violent (Gadon 2003, 27–28). The Minotaur's representation of gendered behaviour in the three novels thus takes its place in a long tradition of modelling multiple masculinities and exploring inner personal conflict. The distance provided by the Minotaur's origins in Antiquity also creates space to enable critique and constructive criticism around gender norms.¹²

⁸ Stephens and McCallum (1998) use Greek myth as one of their examples of how retelling stories reinforces an overarching Western metaethic, from which the tales can never really escape. However, I agree with Miles (2015, 214) that their thesis fails to engage with the ancient world's own sense of myth as a contested and conflicted site of values.

⁹ One excellent example that communicates history and myth is the *Horrible Histories* series of books, featuring titles such as *The Rotten Romans* (Deary 1994) and *The Groovy Greeks* (Deary 1996), which formed the basis of a television series. Lowe (2009) discusses cultural familiarity with Antiquity as distinct to knowledge in the context of video games.

¹⁰ Curley (1988) provides an overview of the Minotaur's story and some of the ways he has been reused over time.

¹¹ See Roberts with Murnaghan's chapter in this volume for how illustrators of children's books skirt the twin issues of adultery and bestiality at the core of the Minotaur story.

¹² The scope for reimagining the Minotaur extends to children's literature aimed at all ages. Weinlich (2015, 95–100) examines the presentation of the myth in two picture books published in 2002, highlighting the variety of ways the same story can be presented for young readers.

A Virtual Monster: Alan Gibbons' *Shadow of the Minotaur* (2000)

Gibbons gives us a Minotaur who looms over the whole book. He creates a classic intrusion fantasy, where a parallel fantastic world breaks into ours, in this case using the medium of video games (Levy and Mendlesohn 2016, 3–4). Fourteen year old Phoenix' family has just moved from London to sleepy Brownleigh so his father, usually called Dad, can take up the job of programming a computer game entitled *The Legendeer*, based on Greek myths played using a virtual reality body suit. Dad is designing the top two levels of the game; in the highest level, the player adopts the persona of Theseus to fight the Minotaur. After a sequence of strange experiences, the game snatches both Dad and Phoenix' friend Laura behind the screen – Phoenix must enter the hostile computing world to save them. Thankfully, for Phoenix Greek myths have never been “just stories” (19),¹³ and not only because of his pride in his Greek roots (14). He turns out to be the Legendeer, a person who can access both this world and parallel “myth-worlds”; his father's game is the plot of a mysterious Gamesmaster to break through the wall between worlds and take over ours (203–204). This discovery helps Phoenix unravel the mystery of his uncle Andreas, long assumed to have been mad, but who actually understood that his job was to shut the door to the “other” world where he really belonged (214–215).

The use of a computer game format affects the narrative structure as it allows the Minotaur to be repeatedly reborn and refought. The classical world has been present in computer games from the very beginning: it is used as “one fantasy world among many others, albeit a particularly rich and evocative one” (Lowe 2009, 87). Early text adventure computer games faced a particular challenge when retelling classical myth, since knowing the progress of a story gave little opportunity for inventiveness in gameplay (McMenomy 2015, 113–114). *The Legendeer's* immersive first person virtual reality environment instead allows the player some ability to find their own solutions – particularly since the game keeps morphing away from the expected mythic narrative. Dad and Phoenix' initial beta-testing challenges the idea that there is only one fixed pattern gameplay can follow, because the game is a work in progress. When the game abducts people after Phoenix names them as his heroine, villain, and incidental characters (47), the virtual world overtakes the real one.¹⁴

¹³ Page references are to the Orion Children's Books 2010 paperback edition.

¹⁴ Waller argues that the computer game should be read as a negative influence: Phoenix relishes the escapism of virtual reality as an alternative to coping with his new life for the first half of the novel (2008, 158–159). Although Waller sees Gibbons presenting videogaming as an addiction parallel to drug use in other YA novels, Phoenix takes as much refuge in his books as he does in the game. Equally, this interpretation relies on contemporary moral panic about the relationship between young people and modern technology.

The Minotaur appears at the beginning of the book, when Phoenix is beta-testing the game for the first time:

But still the beast stood in the archway, pawing at the floor. It was bigger than a man. It stood almost three metres tall and was massively built with slabs of muscle on its chest and shoulders. Below the waist it was bull-like. It had a swinging tail and mud-splattered hooves. Or was it mud? Above the waist it was a man except, that is, for the head. And what a head! The muzzle was huge and when it opened it revealed the sharp, curved teeth, not of a bull but of a big cat. They were the fangs of a lion or tiger, made for ripping flesh. Its eyes were yellow and blazed unflinchingly through the murk. Then there were the great horns, glinting and sharp, curving from its monstrous brow. Thick and muscular as the neck was, it seemed barely able to support such a fearsome head, and strained visibly under the impossible weight.

‘Oh my—’

The beast stepped out from the tunnel, and the boy actually took a few steps back. It was as if his soul had crept out of his body and was tugging at him, begging him to get away. In the sparse light shed from the gratings in the ceiling, the beast looked even more hideous. There was the sweat for a start, standing out in gleaming beads on that enormous neck and shoulders.

But that wasn’t all. The creature was smeared from head to foot with filth and dried blood. It was every inch a killer. The beast began to stamp forward, his hooves clashing on the stone floor. It raised its head, the horns scraping on the ceiling, and gave a bellow that seemed to crush the air. (7)

Phoenix does not succeed in killing the beast on this occasion, or during any other of the visits he makes to the virtual Labyrinth in the first half of the novel. He only achieves victory after playing all the way through levels nine and ten, not when testing a specific part of the scenario. Although he must follow the computer game structure to rescue Dad and Laura, the shadow of the Minotaur is always over him – he knows what the final outcome of his adventure has to be, if he can survive that long.

Through play-testing the final battle sequence, Dad and Phoenix realize that there is something amiss with the game; the Minotaur thus acts as a litmus test of wrongness. Although it has been designed to be monstrous, it becomes more so as it begins to go beyond the bounds which its creator has programmed for it.¹⁵ The first sign that the game has been tampered with appears when Phoenix and Dad discover the Minotaur has a club as a weapon – something Dad did not do, as the beast had “enough advantages already” (52). In this encounter, Phoenix crosses weapons with the beast, but the Minotaur shatters his sword into pieces.

¹⁵ The Minotaur thus proves the truth of Cohen’s second monster thesis – the monster always escapes (1996, 4–5).

It is only because Dad invokes the escape code by shouting “game over!” that Phoenix escapes unharmed. In a subsequent encounter, Phoenix narrowly avoids being gored by the Minotaur’s horns because Dad pulls him out of the way at the last minute (66). Once the game has stolen Dad, Phoenix can no longer rely on him as a safety net during these exploratory dry runs – he begins playing for real.

Phoenix completes the Perseus myth in level nine and eventually arrives at Minos’ court as Theseus, along with Laura in the guise of the game’s heroine.¹⁶ When they discover Dad in the role of Daedalus, they expect him to hatch a plot to free them from the Labyrinth. Instead, he joins them as Minos’ prisoner after he is betrayed by the sorceress Medea and Phoenix’ Brownleigh nemesis Steve Adams, whom Phoenix named as his game’s villain. Phoenix’ experience of *actually* being in the Labyrinth is far more successful than the attempts he made at the beginning of the book. When one of the tributes thrown into the Labyrinth along with the trio pleads for his life, Phoenix finds himself angry because of the similarities he sees between himself and the young man: “But I’ve been changing, he told himself. Now the transformation must be complete” (205–206). He has moved “from zero to hero”, just as a computer game character levels up. Despite the triteness of the metaphor, Gibbons draws a clear parallel between gaming and growing up. The early attempts at fighting the Minotaur were situated in a safe domestic environment with a paternal safety net, while the final denouement occurs in alien territory with no refuge. Phoenix finally feels equal to the task.

The actual killing of the Minotaur, which the book has been circling around since its first page, is rather an anti-climax:

Half-expecting the Minotaur to finish him, he closed his eyes and yelled out a desperate plea. ‘Laura!’

She stabbed with the sword, hard into the Minotaur’s thigh but she couldn’t force the blade through the dense slabs of muscle. The beast roared nonetheless. As it twisted to face its attacker, Laura hacked at its ankles. Stung by the unexpected blows, the beast reeled round, releasing Phoenix. One great fist sent the entire group of Athenians tumbling like skittles. Staggering over to Laura, Phoenix closed his hand round the hilt.

How do you stop a bull charging?¹⁷

‘Face me, beast!’

Weary from its wounds, the Minotaur staggered.

‘The gate’s open,’ shouted Dad. ‘We can get through.’

¹⁶ As part of this quest, Phoenix defeats Medusa, establishing the mechanics of game-play as he fights her and her Gorgon sisters by night.

¹⁷ As reported elsewhere in the novel, the punchline is “take away his credit card”.

Phoenix felt his destiny intense within him and lunged at the Minotaur. Driving the blade upwards and inwards, he felt it grate against the beast's ribs. Then the huge body sagged and its eyes misted over.

Curling backwards, it fell heavily where so many of its victims had fallen before.

'Dead?' asked Laura.

Phoenix stood over the massive frame of the Minotaur.

'Dying.'

He saw bewilderment and pain in its yellow eyes, then the long sigh as they closed. (210–211)

In the "real" final encounter, Laura rather than Dad helps Phoenix deliver the killing blow, signalling a shift towards cooperation rather than dependency, in parallel with Phoenix' own identity transition. The death itself is rather bathetic: since the Minotaur is so explicitly exhausted by its injuries, in its last moments it loses its earlier menace. In fairness, it has been fighting this battle continually throughout the novel, in one form or another, so by this stage it is entitled to be tired.

The repetitive nature of the final battle allowed Phoenix to practice until he built up the skill and ability to win. In the process, he has moved from sulky adolescent to youth of destiny, and has begun to come to terms with the ancestral heritage that will take him out of our world at the close of the trilogy. The use of classical material in games is "thematically familiar" and allows game players to focus on learning how the game mechanics work (McMenomy 2015, 135);¹⁸ similarly, *Shadow* uses a familiar narrative to allow the reader to focus on other elements of the text, such as Phoenix' personal growth. For Gibbons, the Minotaur functions as a rite of passage that can be prepared for, but must ultimately be faced alone. The cyclical nature of computer game play allows Phoenix to build up experience until he believes he can defeat the ultimate villain, conquering his previous fear and channelling his anger into bringing the myth to its proper conclusion. Like his mythical namesake, his experience of many lives brings him to a place of expertise, although the Minotaur is revealed to be stagnant and unable to respond to his growth. While the trajectory of the story may shift, the beast itself ultimately remains the same.

¹⁸ Gibbons consciously plays with the familiarity of generic conventions later in the trilogy, such as Laura's refusal to split up with Phoenix in *Vampyr Legion* (Gibbons 2000) because she knows what happens when you split up (Waller 2008, 169–170).

Not Actually a Monster: Tobias Druitt's *Corydon and the Island of Monsters* (2005)

Corydon offers us a different sort of story. It is an immersive fantasy, set in a self-contained fantasy world (Levy and Mendlesohn 2016, 4). It also offers us the voice, in part, of a child author, as Tobias Druitt is the *nom de plume* of a mother–son writing team.¹⁹ Their heroic protagonist, the shepherd boy Corydon, is himself monstrous – as well as one normal human leg, he has a goat leg as an inheritance from his father, Pan. During the course of the novel he discovers that he is the *mormoluke*, one with a special destiny to help overthrow the Olympians.²⁰ The novel's general message is that monsters are people too, and vice versa. The nominal “hero”, Perseus, is a cowardly opportunist who convinces an army of hopefuls to fight against the monsters and gain shares of a non-existent Golden Hoard. This subversive take on the traditional hero narrative plays into wider themes of ironic fantasy in YA publishing (Levy and Mendlesohn 2016, 173).

Early in the novel, as he minds his flock, Corydon is seized by a crew of pirates running a freak show that displays various captured monsters. Corydon first notices the Minotaur among his fellow prisoners:

Corydon had been too intent on their exchanges to notice the other cages, but as he looked around he became aware of them. The many-eyed thing was a hydra. The bellowing creature was a minotaur, and there was also an enormous lion whose breath was sharp flames, a woman with the body of a serpent, a woman with the wings of a great bird, and the claws, too, and a lion with the head of a woman, wearing a tall jewelled hat. They were all astounding, powerful. Just glancing at the crowned, winged one made Corydon's belly turn to water and his knees to jelly. For the first time, he wondered how the scruffy pirates could possibly be keeping all this power leashed. Every nightmare in the world was here, and some that the world had not yet even begun to dream. (33)

Corydon's first encounter with his fellow monsters generates fear and alienation, but the individual characters of the beasts soon emerge, particularly as he talks to Medusa, who is held in a nearby cage. After Corydon and Medusa have escaped, Corydon returns to the camp with the Gorgon sisters Euryale and Sthenno to release the others. As the beasts disappear to find homes on the island, the Minotaur speaks for the first time:

¹⁹ Professor Diane Purkiss teaches English at Keble College, Oxford, and Michael Dowling was ten when the book was published.

²⁰ The ancient Greeks had a child-eating ogress named Mormo; *mormolukes* in ancient literature were also sometimes identified with *lamiae*. See Johnston (1999, 161–202) for an overview of where Mormo fits into a wider pattern of ancient Greek folklore.

But as they flew or drifted or ambled off into the gathering darkness of evening, only the Minotaur spoke.

In his shy, dark voice he asked, simply, 'Where is she?'

'Medusa?' Corydon was surprised, and a little annoyed. Inside himself he felt Medusa was his. He hadn't known that she had other friends. 'Afar off,' he said, grandly, and seeing the beast-man's shoulders lump, he relented. 'Actually, I am returning to her now. Would you care to follow? But we fly fast.'

'Oh, we needn't,' said Euryale sociably. To her own astonishment, she was enjoying the day. 'Need we, Sthenno?'

Sthenno wasn't enjoying herself as much, but she liked the warm, furry, confused monster before them. There was something comforting about him. (57–58)

The binaries of traditional definitions break down as Sthenno describes the Minotaur with positive adjectives as well as calling him a monster; the Minotaur's humanity, the other side of the beast–human dyad, begins to emerge.²¹ Much of his inner life revolves around his unexpected and, to Corydon, unwelcome affection for Medusa. Their low-key love story runs in parallel to the main plot.

When Corydon meets Medusa, she is heavily pregnant, and eventually gives birth to her son Gorgoliskos. Perseus steals the child under the mistaken belief that it is a human baby the monsters are going to sacrifice; Medusa challenges him to a duel to rescue her son, in which she dies. As the monsters gather to bid her farewell, her parting with the Minotaur has a knowingness about it, a hint of the romance that might have been:

The Minotaur limped in. He took her lilac-coloured hand in his great brown ones.

'I have been sacrificing for you,' he said. 'To the powers of underearth. Hecate. The Lady of Flowers. The Lord of Many. And now I have come to say goodbye.' His voice did not break, but he had to steady it. Medusa smiled at him, and brushed his shoulder with her other hand. For a moment their eyes locked, and each thought, 'Tomorrow. If there is a tomorrow.' Then the moment was over, gone, borne away like a shade in the Styx. (321)

These lines point towards a deeper emotional life that never really blossoms on the page, partly because of the inevitable focus on Corydon as protagonist, partly because of Medusa's cynicism and the Minotaur's reserve.²² There is a wide gap

²¹ Again, see Roberts with Murnaghan's chapter in this volume for the trend in illustration that bring out the Minotaur's pitiable aspects.

²² Medusa's personal life is a nod towards the romance tropes found in more realistic YA, as well as the paranormal romances such as the *Twilight* saga (Meyer 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008).

between this affair-that-never-was and Medusa's brief but wild encounter with Poseidon (46–47), which was driven by her attraction to his wildness and the god's desire. The god "slid away" as Medusa began her transformation, abandoning her to the consequences of their actions both in terms of her monstrosity and her pregnancy. By contrast, this chaste touching of hands suggests the tragedy of the relationship that will never be explored.

Throughout the novel, the Minotaur embodies what is sometimes called the "strong, silent type" of man. He is taciturn and solitary; he suppresses his emotions, only demonstrating his feelings on rare but powerful occasions such as when he says goodbye to Medusa. Even though his masculinity is defined by this stereotype, he acts as the most positive adult masculine role model that Corydon and the reader encounter. The heroes, to whom one might conventionally turn, demonstrate a wide range of unheroic character flaws; the pirates are straightforward villains who do not unexpectedly redeem themselves; the gods abuse their divine position and pay little attention to humans. Perseus' continual struggle to get his father Zeus to call him the right name, and his memories of humiliating holidays with his divine nymph-chasing parent on Aphrodite's island (171), encapsulate the disappointment of looking to one of the so-called "good guys" for inspiration.

The Minotaur also points towards other ways of performing masculinity through the hidden depths he sometimes reveals. He has military prowess that he demonstrates when he designs a ballista to help the monsters fight the heroes (290–291), although elsewhere he is reluctant to fight (188). During Medusa's funeral games, he "to general surprise, won a storytelling contest with a tale of a man who made a labyrinth and became trapped in it himself" (350). Masculinity thus becomes about competently and responsibly providing just the right skills at just the right moment. It is no coincidence that in the sequel, *Corydon and the Fall of Atlantis* (2006), the kidnapped Minotaur refuses to design weapons for his Atlantean captors' benefit. In his half-man half-beast form, the Minotaur thus acts as a substitute for Corydon's real father, the absent god Pan, just as Medusa becomes a replacement for the biological mother who drove him out of his village.

The Minotaur's other main role in the novel is to accompany Corydon into the Underworld, as part of the boy's quest to understand the prophecy of the *mormoluke* and thus understand himself. The Minotaur is an unexpected companion, who joins Corydon at Medusa's wish:

‘Do you know where I am going?’

‘I know you go to the realm of the dead,’ said the rumbling voice softly, as if whispering a secret. Yet Corydon was amazed to hear him say openly what even the Sphinx had avoided: the word *dead*. It reverberated in the air. ‘I have been there once before. That is why she sent me to accompany you and to teach you the way.’

Corydon was glad; the Minotaur’s warmth and solidity suddenly seemed comforting, rocklike. (218)

Corydon shows remarkably little curiosity about the Minotaur’s earlier journey at this stage. Instead, the Minotaur is a warm, solid figure; that his physical presence rather than his words comfort Corydon once more plays into the strong, silent stereotype. The reader finds out more about the Minotaur’s first entrance to the realm of the dead when the pair meet Charon. The ferryman to the Underworld remembers the Minotaur’s previous visit:

‘We want to cross!’ shouted the Minotaur into the wind. The strange old man looked up at the sound of his voice; he seemed more attentive to sounds than to sights. ‘I know you,’ he said, his eyes narrowing to try to see better. ‘You have been in this realm before.’

‘Yes,’ admitted the Minotaur.

‘I told you it wouldn’t work,’ said the old man, and he began to cackle, shrilly, heartlessly.

‘Yes, you were right,’ said the Minotaur.

‘What is he talking about?’ bawled Corydon.

‘I was here before. I tried to enter the Hall of Poesis and be reborn as an ordinary man instead of a monster. I loved a woman who would have nothing to do with me. Queen Pasiphae. She was my mother. She hated me and she ran from me. She shut me in a great underground place. Despair led me here.’ He sighed. ‘But it didn’t work.’

Corydon hardly knew what to say. The Minotaur’s misery was more chilling than the wind. Yet the furry monster seemed to draw courage from having told his story. (224–225)

Analyzing the way the Minotaur’s monstrosity contributed to the breakdown of the mother–son relationship is the closest any of the novels get to the bestiality problem. His failure to be reborn as a non-monstrous child shows Corydon that monstrosity is a fundamental part of who they both are and cannot be escaped.²³

²³ Although this is the only hint of the Labyrinth that *Corydon* gives us, in *Corydon and the Fall of Atlantis*, the Minotaur is “unwilling to go beyond the boundaries of the

The chosen family of monsters is thus as important for the Minotaur as it is for Corydon, compensating for the shared pain of maternal rejection. Corydon's journey into the Underworld, then, is cast in opposition to the Minotaur's failed quest – where the beast failed to change who he was, Corydon will come closer to understanding his identity.

Corydon travels through the Underworld with the Minotaur as a mostly silent companion. His physical strength and endurance help the young boy survive the chilling cold of the dead land, and his prior experience warns Corydon of the various traps they encounter. Corydon remains the central figure of the tale, and it is he who must escape the final deception of the Underworld – a utopian dream-world where he has two normal legs, a loving mother, and an affectionate present father rather than the absent Pan, perhaps a vision that plays on the bucolic nature of his name (257–270). His decision to abandon this fake idyll and return to the ghastliness of the upper world, including the Minotaur, marks a return to his substitute family. This rejection of an idealized domestic world reflects the trend in YA literature to engage with the struggles of conventional families, and to explore how children survive and thrive outside traditional family structures (Reynolds 2009, 207). The Minotaur stands for a network of relationships that offer more to Corydon than his biological family have ever done.

That said, Corydon's real father proves instrumental in the boy's escape from the Underworld by coming into the dreamworld in disguise and strengthening Corydon's resolve to leave. He also takes on an authoritative paternal role when the Minotaur is wounded in an encounter with some wild boar on the return journey to the upper world; after Corydon has summoned him, he carries the man-bull out of the Underworld back to the other monsters. Pan then vanishes, allowing the Minotaur to resume the position of substitute parent. Corydon uses his identity as Pan's son to protect his protector, thus taking on his companion's defensive role, but also his verbal silence. There is almost no conversation between the father and son, but Corydon plays his pipes all the way back to the upper world.

Given the toxic masculinity perpetrated by Perseus in deceiving his army by playing on their greed and his warmongering, the reader sympathizes with Corydon's choice to follow the Minotaur's quieter path. His destiny as the *mormoluke* who will defeat the Olympians is an unwelcome intrusion into his pastoral life – as the Minotaur wishes to quietly tend his bees, so Corydon only wishes to care for his sheep.

small and ordered world he had made for himself' (Druitt 2006, 14), suggesting he has recreated his imprisonment.

A Sexual Monster: Charlie Fletcher's *Stoneheart* (2006)

Stoneheart is deeply embedded in the City of London, perhaps reconnecting to a very particular cityscape in response to a sense that teenagers are losing their connection to characterful spaces (Bean and Moni 2003). Another intrusion fantasy, it is one of several recent YA books to use London's layered history as a shifting palimpsest for its narrative (Levy and Mendlesohn 2016, 179–180). The hidden London in this case consists of its prolific statuary, which can come to life although most of the city's population live in blissful ignorance of this fact. Statues which are non-human, or taints, are engaged in a long-running feud with human statues, known as spits.

The hero of the novel, a twelve-year-old boy called George, falls into this world by accidentally damaging a statue outside the Natural History Museum. He meets Edie, a girl “of George's age” (41)²⁴ who has the power to glint or channel the past, and the Gunner, a statue from the Royal Artillery Memorial, who acts as his mentor and guide. He discovers that he is a hereditary Maker, one who can create and destroy statues; although he initially denies this, his father was an artist who worked in clay and other media, and George has gained the talent through him. The boy becomes a target for the London Stone, rather brilliantly cast as the book's villain, and its henchman, the long-lived Elizabethan alchemist John Dee, known as the Walker.²⁵ The Minotaur statue found in the Barbican is the last of a number of taints sent to pursue George and Edie. When the statue is first set loose, Fletcher provides a lengthy description to help his reader visualize it:

The Raven dropped to the earth in front of the reeds and looked up at the feathery tips being buffeted by the wind and the rain squall breaking overhead.

Above it crouched a powerful figure, black and shiny in the rain, the wetness coursing over its hunched and massive body, reflecting the surrounding street-lights. It was an unmistakably male figure; below the waist, a man with strong over-muscled legs bent to spring out of the rushes at any unwary passer-by. But his principal feature was in the predominance of muscle and bulk curving up from the waist; not the muscle of a man, but the raw brutal power and bulk of a full-grown bull. The shoulders hunched massively below a bull's head topped by aggressively pointing horns; and so well had the sculptor shaped it, that the sound of enraged snorting seemed to lurk about it, even though it never – to the normal eye – moved or breathed at all. (372–373)

²⁴ Page references are to the Hodder Children's Books 2007 paperback edition.

²⁵ The London Stone is a block of limestone currently housed in the Museum of London but for many years on display at 111 Cannon Street. Its provenance is not known, but it has been in the city since at least 1598, and was a well-known landmark. Among many possible histories, it has been identified as a remnant of Roman London.

The understatement “unmistakably male” to describe the figure euphemistically refers to the large erect phallus of the actual statue, something that might challenge any parent taking their child around London to see the statues featured in the book.²⁶

The Minotaur’s task is to snatch Edie so that the London Stone can use her as a bargaining chip to get hold of George. George and the Gunner track the beast into its lair; the Gunner calls it the London Labyrinth, but a handy sign they pass on the way identifies it as the Barbican (429). The crisis prompts George to face the quandary of his identity – will he accept or reject his inheritance as a Maker? Although he resists the label, the Gunner is in no doubt that there is something innate in George that he cannot run from:

‘You’re fighting because you got something to fight for. The mark is what got you into trouble, but it’s also what might help you out of it. The mark says you might be a maker.’

‘I’m not a maker! I don’t make anything.’

But his hand was, he noticed, back in his pocket kneading away at the Plasticene blob.

‘You may not know what you are, but I’ll tell you what, the taints know it, and after I seen you with that dragon at Temple Bar I think I know it. It’s in your blood and it’s in your bone. You done well, son. You looked to be made of pretty dodgy stuff when I first seen you. Just goes to show. It’s like Jagger used to say in his studio – it’s not just the clay: it’s what you make of it.’

George thought of his dad, quietly sucking at the cigarette parked in the side of his face, hands working at the clay in between them. Before he could think further, the Gunner ran on. (434–435)

George’s failure to acknowledge his power meant he damaged the carving which set off the chain of events in the book. The encounter with the Minotaur gives him a chance to channel that power purposefully and responsibly. His opportunity comes when the Gunner tries to shoot the Minotaur and free Edie, but runs out of bullets. As they face certain death, George realizes he must see if he has a Maker’s skill by crafting a replacement bullet from the blob of Plasticene he has

²⁶ In the best traditions of fantasy literature, *Stoneheart*’s frontispiece is a map of London marking where all the statues George and Edie encounter on their journey may be found. The Minotaur statue, although still in the Barbican, has been relocated since *Stoneheart* was published; at the time the novel was written, it sat on St. Alphage Highwalk, since demolished. It was initially located in Postman’s Park, although the turf maze that was meant to accompany it never materialized. At the time this chapter was written, it sat next to the Barbican lake, but its next move was planned to a new development at London Wall Place.

been carrying about since the start of the book. If he fails, the trio will be at the Minotaur's mercy.

Fletcher postpones the moment of truth with an almost literal cliff-hanger. Although George creates a bullet and inserts it into the Gunner's weapon, the Gunner and the Minotaur fall off the roof of the Barbican onto a passing bus just as George is about to shoot the bull. The Gunner manages to wedge the Minotaur into the underside of a bridge, but this means the beast can drop upon George and Edie as they chase after the bus. The final confrontation with the beast plays out as follows:

There was a noise. A small one. A creak, from above them. As one they stopped panning the streetscape looking for trouble and looked up, straight over their heads.

Something dark and horned wrenched itself free from the traffic lights over their heads and dropped like an anvil.

They had time to jerk out of the way of its hooves as it crashed to the ground, but not enough time to escape the grabbing arms that caught them – Edie by the upper arm, George by the throat. [...]

George could see Edie struggling and kicking and trying to shout something at him, but he couldn't hear a word. And before he could think of what to do next, the Minotaur had jerked him down to its muzzle and was sniffing at him, and then tasting his face with a tongue like a thick slug.

George gagged, and then he was lofted in the air and he saw Edie being sniffed at in turn. And as the tongue lolled out and swirled over her hair and head he saw the plea in her eyes and saw the way she flinched; and he saw too how the flinching pleased the Minotaur, and saw its strange mouth twist into an open-mouthed panting smile; and it was much more than George could take.

It wasn't the beast's leer so much as the look and the flinching shudder in Edie's eye that spiked the protective anger that made his hand pull out of the jacket with the revolver in it. [...]

And he adjusted his aim and found the hot eyeball rolling up to meet his over the gun-sight, and the Bull began to roar, and the black prickly feeling flushed up into him. And not for a moment did he think the bullet he'd made wouldn't work; only that he might spoil this by missing. And so as the heavy gun shook in his hand he thought of nothing but controlling the shake, and everything was suddenly still, and the tiny eye he was targeting suddenly seemed big as a barn door and:

BLAM.

George felt the gun buck in his hand. The roaring was cut off like a knife. The hands spasmed open, and George and Edie dropped to the ground.

The Bull's head rocked back, then forward, then back again, shaking fast and faster, its mouth straining to make a noise as it juddered horribly like it was trying

to shake the bullet – George’s bullet – out of its head. Then it stood up, looked at him with an eye leaking something like molten bronze, snarled and began to lunge at him – then dropped like a stone. (455–457)

George not only creates the instrument of the Minotaur’s demise, but also acts as the agent of the beast’s death. The Minotaur invades the personal space of both children and creates a claustrophobic fear as it smells and sniffs them as a potential meal. However, the beast’s leer and panting when handling Edie crosses the line from the hungry to the sexual. The ambivalence here builds on earlier comments in the text – the Walker’s observation that children excite the Minotaur’s appetites (416) and his threat to let the bull do “what he will with the girl-child” (420); the Gunner’s response to George’s question about whether the Minotaur will eat Edie with “not as such” (427); the Minotaur groping Edie’s body as it runs back to its home (432); the Gunner’s query, after he has used all his bullets, about whether George knows what the Minotaur does to little girls (444).²⁷ Although the Minotaur is under the London Stone’s control, its only duty is to keep George alive – Edie is collateral.

Edie’s predicament is made more painful by the reader’s knowledge of a similar encounter retold in flashback earlier in the novel, when she remembered running away from a man chasing after her with a knife, and which finished with her panicking as he grabbed her hair (78–82). Although the incident is not decoded in *Stoneheart*, at the beginning of the sequel *Ironhand* (2007) Edie explains to George that this episode involved her stepfather, after she had glinted something unpleasant in his beach hut, and that she had killed him by hitting him with a pebble in self-defence (26–31). She deliberately withholds what she saw when she glinted from George and the reader, saying only that: “I realised I was in the wrong place” (29). We discover in *Silvertongue* (2008), the final volume of the trilogy, that she saw her mother being captured by the Walker, aided by her stepfather (278). Emotional cruelty clearly played a significant role in Edie’s domestic life, and the text provides the narrative space for more sinister interpretations of the family dynamic.

George pulls the trigger because he wishes to protect Edie from implicitly sexual abuse. In doing so, he also makes a choice about masculinities. The Minotaur’s maleness, so visually emphasized in the original statue and in the sexualized language of the text, suggests a world in which the prime motivators are physical desire and competition for dominance, with no consideration of other people’s autonomy or rights. The division between man and bull means the two halves of the Minotaur hate each other (Fletcher 2007a, 426), so his actions act out the conflict between the primitive and the civilized. He shares this “mad split at [the] core” (Fletcher 2007b, 126) with the statue of Icarus made by the

²⁷ The use of personal pronouns to refer to the Minotaur is inconsistent throughout the book.

same sculptor;²⁸ straddling the line between human and beast enables the darkest elements of masculinity.

George risks becoming a literal victim of that identity, but instead chooses the masculinity modelled by his father and by the Gunner.²⁹ Memories of his father's quiet and affectionate parenting, when George watched him work on his sculpture, permeate the narrative. This remembrance is the final part of George forgiving himself that the last conversation he had with his father before his death in a car crash was deliberately hurtful (Fletcher 2007a, 351–353). In the act of creation, he remembers the Gunner's cool use of his gun alongside how bullets behave. At the critical moment, George draws on these two role models to help him use the gun calmly himself and to trust that he has imitated his father in creating a proper bullet.

Ultimately George succeeds in killing the Minotaur, but his victory is over more than a statue – he defeats a way of behaviour. Before discovering that Edie has been snatched, the Gunner noted that George has changed over the course of the book: “whatever he'd been going through was making him stand straighter and take charge” (413). As part of this change, George must choose what sort of person he is going to become. Through its combination of man and beast, in its pawing and slobbering, the Minotaur symbolically embodies a base form of manhood. During his journey towards adulthood, George rejects the behaviour encapsulated in the stereotype of the inner beast come to life in favour of the equally stereotypical calm protector.

Making a Monstrous Whole

These three novels are linked by the discovery of the messianic identities of their protagonists – “children charged not with learning to survive and become responsible citizens but with saving the world” (Reynolds 2009, 195). The impact of the fantastic does not merely affect the children it touches, but the future of the world is at stake in their response (Levy and Mendlesohn 2016, 133). Their struggle to come to terms with an inherited part of their identity, whether as the Legendeer, the *mormoluke*, or a Maker, thus has a global significance. The Minotaur functions as part of that struggle. By encountering and facing it, the protagonist comes closer to attaining self-knowledge and understanding their particular salvatory nature.

More symbolically, in each novel the Minotaur acts as a locus of explicitly masculine behaviour for the young reader, along with the protagonist, to accept or reject. Complex representations of masculinity, offering boy heroes with emo-

²⁸ Much of Michael Ayrton's body of work explores various points in the Minotaur–Daedalus myth sequence.

²⁹ In *Silvertongue*, Edie will find similar models for emulation in the statues of Boadicea and her daughters on Westminster Bridge.

tional depth, have been popular with readers since *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Treasure Island* (Simmons 2009, 154); the potential of the Minotaur in YA literature is his ability to embody a subject position for the reader to explore which is distinct from the main protagonist and explicitly allows the bestial to emerge. This independence means the Minotaur becomes a testing bed for heavily polarized gender roles, although YA literature avoids engaging with the creature's own conception. The possibilities the Minotaur offers tend to be negative, but as *Corydon* shows, this mythic creature is as open to a resistant retelling as any other myth.

The very conservative models of masculinity, both to be copied and to be rejected, suggest that a strong thread of social conformism connects the novels, not unrelated to the traditional cultural associations drawn between the Minotaur and aberrant sexuality. *Stoneheart* explicitly aligns the monster with sexual aggression, while *Shadow* relies on the rite of passage motif to explain its inevitable demise. Even though *Corydon* attempts to make the Minotaur stand for something other than carnality, it has to resort to the strong, silent stereotype rather than offering a truly radical vision of manhood. The monster thus polices the reader. By only offering options which fit into a well-understood patriarchal framework of social values, it implies that these are the only possibilities available, defining the limits of what is conceivable for these young adult readers.³⁰ The Minotaur's presence encourages them to question the choices they are given, not to enquire whether alternative models are available.

The Minotaur, then, provides a space for young male readers of these texts to face up to the parts of themselves that they feel ambivalent about, and to contemplate the sort of adult which they will eventually become within socially acceptable parameters. Although the story of his conception is sanitized or replaced, the Minotaur remains a powerful figure for exploring issues that affect a young adult audience. As a creature poised on the boundary between the human and the bestial, he offers a unique subject position for authors to experiment with gender roles and reflect on what it means to be a man.

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³⁰ Again, this follows from Cohen's fifth monster thesis, that the monster polices the border of the possible (1996, 12–16).

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MARKUS JANKA and MICHAEL STIERSTORFER

Semibovemque virum semivirumque bovem: Mythological Hybrid Creatures as Key Fairy-Tale Actors in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Postmodern Fantasy Literature and Media for Children and Young Adults

After a preliminary overview of some mythical creatures in the crucial works for young recipients we consider the basic question which range of mythical beasts fantasy literature has developed since the early boom of that genre in the 1960s. Next, we discuss how mythical beasts are functionalized in (post-)modern literature and media for children and young adults. At the core of this paper, we study the example of the Minotaur to demonstrate in which way the paradigmatic hybrid creature of Cretan mythology is transformed into a fairy-tale figure.

An Overview of Functionalizations of Mythical Beasts in Contemporary Fantasy Literature

Our main thesis will be established by comparing classical Greek and Latin hypotexts with their postmodern hypertexts: a diachronic examination of novels with mythological elements will reveal that, since the establishment of that genre in the 1950s and 1960s, fantasy¹ literature is full of elements taken from Graeco-Roman mythology. Therefore, we will firstly pick out prototypical examples of this genre which adopt single features from the existing pool of mythic elements, so-called “mythemes”,² in an eclectic way. In the classic *The Last Unicorn* (1968) by Peter S. Beagle (b. 1939) there is a so-called midnight-circus. In this circus, belonging to the old witch Mommy Fortuna, we find a mantichor – a hybrid animal, partly lion, partly scorpion, partly human, furthermore, there is Cerberus, the watchdog of hell, an old satyr, the dangerous harpy Celaeno, and finally the arrogant mythic weaver Arachne, famous through Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (6.1–

¹ This genre is defined with the help of the two-world-structure-model of Nikolajeva (1988).

² This term, which concerns the division of myth into a bundle of smaller elements, was coined by Heidmann Vischer (2000). However, this term was already used by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1955, 431).

145), where she was transformed into a spider after having artfully woven an image of the eccentric and chaotic universe with the help of her thin threads. *Die unendliche Geschichte* [The Neverending Story, 1979] by Michael Ende (1929–1995) presents the centaur Caíron as a bringer of the magic amulet called Aurin, who has an ancestor (Cheiron), e.g., in Homer’s *Iliad* (11.828–832). In this ancient epic poem, the centaur – a mixture between human being and horse – is a healer and teacher of the prominent doctor Asclepius and of the famous warrior Achilles. In her novel for children *Ronja rövardotter* [Ronja, the Robber’s Daughter, 1982], Astrid Lindgren (1907–2002) invents aggressive hybrid creatures, part bird and part woman, that are called *vildvittrorna* in Swedish. Because of their beautiful and at the same time thrilling and horrible appearance, they show some striking similarities to the harpies in Hesiod’s *Theogony* (265–269), and indeed, the “harpies” is also their name in the English translation of the novel (1985). Furthermore, in the preeminent Harry Potter series (1997–2007), the classical philologist J. K. Rowling (b. 1965) integrates a lot of mythical hybrid beings as antagonists or helpful creatures into her fantastic plot.³ For example, the famous three-headed watchdog of Hades called Cerberus, which prominently appears in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (4.500–501, 7.406–409), pops up as the gigantic watchdog Fluffy. It protects the entrance to the chamber where the philosopher’s stone is hidden in the volume *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (1997). In the volume *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998), Rowling reinvents not only the basilisk with a Medusa-like gaze that transforms students of Hogwarts into stone but also the phoenix Fawkes, which is the pet of the headmaster Dumbledore and is able to resurrect from its own ashes after dying. Both creatures are mentioned in the *Naturalis historia* of Pliny the Elder in the first century AD. In Rowling’s novel, they meet and fight each other to death in the Chamber of Secrets. Last but not least a griffin called Buckbeak transports Harry Potter securely and efficiently through the air in the novel *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999). Griffins, hybrid creatures with parts of an eagle and lion or even horse respectively, are described in Herodotus’ *Histories* (e.g., 3.116.1, 4.13.1). Finally, even the centaurs of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (12.182–535) occur, e.g., in *Harry Potter and the Order*

³ Dagmar Hofmann is concerned with this issue in a paper which focuses on mythical creatures such as centaurs, the phoenix, and werewolves in the Harry Potter series. She concludes that these hybrid creatures are a combination of various mythological traditions: “Many of the creatures constitute a conglomerate of different traditions with impacts of Celtic, Germanic and oriental legends, as well as Greek and Roman mythology. Ancient myths and fables are presented throughout the series; many beasts have ancient appellations like the basilisk, the griffin, the phoenix or the centaurs” (2015, 164).

of the Phoenix (2003). They drive the power-hungry new head of Hogwarts, Dolores Umbridge, out into the dark woods.⁴

These examples, taken from prominent works of classical fantasy literature, can prove the hypothesis that modern authors tend to mould hybrid creatures for their plots, especially by adapting them from the prototypical tradition established by Graeco-Roman mythology and putting them as new transformations into their narratives in order to invent helpful figures for the hero(ine) or dangerous antagonists to oppose his/her endeavours. The novels mentioned above can be regarded as pioneers of the current boom of fantasy novels with a wide range of mythological elements taken from Graeco-Roman mythology.

Research Discourse Regarding Functionalizations of Mythical Beasts in Media for Children and Young Adults

In which ways are creatures that are rooted in ancient mythology functionalized in current media for children and young adults? One of the reasons for the remarkable revival of mythological beasts, especially during the last decade, could be found in the fact that those exotic hybrid monsters can nowadays be “authentically” visualized with the help of the latest digital technology. Such vivid and impressive animation was impossible before the digital revolution.⁵ This development is discussed by Reinhold Zwick in a paper about the movie *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* (2010, dir. Chris Columbus), remarkable because of its powerful visualization of hybrid beasts such as the Furies, the Minotaur, the Hydra, satyrs, and centaurs (Zwick 2013, 16; similarly Rueppel 2004, 9, with regard to fantasy literature).

Hans Richard Brittnacher examines the aesthetics of the ugly and horror constituted by polymorphic creatures appearing in fantasy. Medieval and modern monsters often resemble classical ancestors such as deformed deities (e.g., Hephaestus/Vulcan), hybrid creatures like Anubis or Janus, or deities transformed (temporarily) into animals (Adonis/boar, Demeter/pig, Dionysos/bull, cf. Brittnacher 1994, 185).

Almut-Barbara Renger emphasizes that mythical hybrid creatures in particular – some of Oriental origin, e.g., basilisks, centaurs, manticore, the Minotaur, Pegasus, Phoenix, Sirens, Sphinx, werewolf... – and demons or monsters appearing in the Graeco-Roman Underworld – e.g., Cerberus, Chimaera, Empusa, Ephialtes (one of the Aload brothers), Gello, Gorgons, Hecate, Lamia, Striges – are instrumentalized in modern fantasy (2013, 5).

⁴ The centaurs Firenze (see also Stierstorfer 2017) and Ronan function as helpful characters supporting the hero, e.g., in the first volume.

⁵ In this context, one might just recall the crooked movements of the puppet-like monster figures in the undemanding American movie *Clash of the Titans* (Davis 1981).

Graeco-Roman mythology is therefore revived in fantasy as a multifold source of mythical hybrid monsters (for further comprehensive information cf. Stierstorfer 2016). These creatures are transformed into effective, helpful figures or mean and dangerous antagonists in recent media for children and young adults.

The Functionalization of the Minotaur-Myth in Contemporary Fantasy Adapting Greek and Roman Hypotexts

Let us now focus on a hybrid creature of Graeco-Roman mythology which became particularly prominent following the centuries so that it remains a perfect example of a mythological beast: the Minotaur. To start with, we trace the postmodern familiarization of the strange myth of the bull-man Minotaur back to the hypotexts in Greek and Latin literature.

In the first century AD, the Platonic philosopher and biographer Plutarch wrote an amusing dialogue, *Bruta animalia ratione uti, sive Gryllus*, between a mythological beast with a human brain and language and Odysseus, the smartest of all Greek heroes. Gryllus, one of Odysseus' comrades, who was transformed into a pig by Circe, talks to his commander and refuses a new metamorphosis which would bring him back to his human state. Instead, he praises the comparatively modest life as an animal which indulges only in natural desires, whereas some human beings with excessive sexual preferences dare to commit intercourse with animals. Due to such intercourses, hybrid creatures arise and are regarded as threatening symbols of unrestrained passion:

καὶ γὰρ αἰγῶν ἐπειράθησαν ἄνδρες καὶ ὄων καὶ ἵππων μινύμενοι καὶ γυναῖκες ἄρρεσι θηρίοις ἐπεμάνησαν· ἐκ γὰρ τῶν τοιοῦτων γάμων ὑμῖν Μινώταυροι καὶ Αἰγίπανες, ὡς δ' ἐγῶμαι καὶ Σφίγγες ἀναβλαστάνουσι καὶ Κένταυροι. (Plut. *Mor.* 990F7–991A3)

For men even dared to have intercourse with goats, pigs and horses, women were crazily in love with male animals; out of such couples among you (humans) the Minotauri and Aigipanes, and, as I suppose, even the Sphinxes and Centaurs arose.⁶

This enjoyable and humorous dialogue with popular philosophical content (Plutarch 2015, 105–124) already hints at the furious passion which led the Cretan queen Pasiphaë⁷ to her outrageous intercourse with the bull that was to become the father of the Minotaur. This hybrid offspring is placed by Plutarch's Gryllus

⁶ English translation of the Greek original by M. J.

⁷ For a positivist record of literary and iconographic sources, see Roscher (1965a, 3004–3011).

in the category of uncanny hybrid creatures and serves (here rather obliquely) as a paradigm of a monstrous family story.

This interpretation can be traced back to the earliest literary evidence of the Minotaur in Greek literature (cf. Roscher 1965a, 1666–1673 and Poland 1932). It seems that almost from the beginning, this superhuman and bewildering being of primordial legend and cult is tamed and made accessible by the political frame of a tragedy within a ruling family. Early literary and iconographic evidence of the Minotaur coincides with the dreadful image of the dangerous, roaring, and horned “bukephalos” with a human body as a particularly challenging antagonist for the young Theseus⁸ on his mission of saving the Attic tributes.⁹

It is striking that one of our most impressive literary sources of the “Theseus Saves the Attic Tributes”-story in Greek literature lacks any direct reference to the Minotaur. The lyric poet Bacchylides from Keos composed a vivid dithyrambic ode entitled *Youth (Athenians), or Theseus* (17[16] Snell).¹⁰ Here, the lyric narration unfolds a kind of prequel to the showdown between Theseus and the Minotaur in the Cretan Labyrinth. The story sung by Bacchylides’ chorus is situated on the ship which transports Theseus and the fourteen Athenian victims to Crete. King Minos, who is present, sexually assaults a young Athenian girl. Undaunted by the previous defeats of Athens in the war, Theseus protects the innocence of the girl against the king in an act of heroic defiance. This frame of mind leads him first to a rhetoric strike against Minos and then to the miraculous reveal of his divine ancestry by Poseidon himself:

A' Κυανόπρωϊρα μὲν ναῦς μενέκτυ[πον
 Θησέα δις ἐπτ[ά] τ' ἀγλαοὺς ἄγουσα
 κούρους Ἰαόνω[ν
 Κρητικὸν τάμνεν πέλαγος·
 ...
 κνίσεν τε Μίνωϊ κέαρ
 ἡμεράμπυκος θεᾶς
 Κύπριδος [ἀ]γνὰ δῶρα·
 χεῖρα δ' οὐ[κέτι] παρθενικᾶς
 ἄπερθ' ἐράτυεν, θίγεν
 δὲ λευκᾶν παρηίδον· (dith. 17[16], vv. 1–4 and 8–13, eds. Bruno Snell
 and Herwig Maehler in Bacchylides 1970)

⁸ On the various ancient traditions about “Attic Hercules”, see Herter (1973).

⁹ On the connection between Theseus and the Minotaur in ancient Greek art and literature, see Poland (1932, 1928) with reference to the increasing number of vase paintings depicting Theseus’ fighting against the Minotaur.

¹⁰ See the interpretation given by Zimmermann (1992, 77–94), who discusses not only aetiological and cultic implications (concerning, e.g., the connection between Theseus and Apollo), but also the date of the poem which he situates in the 470s BC when the rise of the Attic–Delic sea empire was beginning to take place (93–94).

A' Dark was the prow of the ship that carried
 the strong fighter Theseus with twice seven
 children of the Ionians [= Athenians]

to Crete, crossing the sea.

...

And excited was Minos' heart
 by the goddess with lovely jewelry,
 by Cypris and her brilliant gifts.

And his hand near the virgin
 was not kept away from her, but he touched
 the bright white cheeks.¹¹

The act of sexual harassment committed by Minos foreshadows the deadly violence threatening the Athenian youth in the Cretan Labyrinth. In this sense, Minos and his unrestrained desire symbolize his cruel “stepson”, the monstrous Minotaur. Similarly, Theseus' return from the palace of the sea-gods as a brilliant hero foreshadows his final victory against the subhuman beast with a human head residing in the Labyrinth.

Some years after Bacchylides' choral song, the tragic poet Euripides brought this “dysfunctional” Cretan family story surrounding the Minotaur even onto the stage of the Attic *polis*. Unfortunately, only a few fragments of his drama, *The Cretans*, have survived. Verses preserved on papyri, however, allow us to reconstruct the plot line at least sketchily. It seems plausible that the dramatic crisis emerges immediately after the Cretan queen Pasiphaë gives birth to the hybrid baby Minotaur.¹² Pasiphaë's now evident adultery with a bull drives her husband to eruptive anger so that he threatens to kill his wife. Exposed to this danger, Pasiphaë justifies herself by putting the blame on the gods. By not sacrificing the splendid bull, Minos has challenged Poseidon, who has thus punished the Cretan king. In a *rhexis* directed to her husband, Pasiphaë apologizes for her evil lust with the following, seemingly sound, argument:

ἀλγῶ μὲν, ἐστὶ δ' οὐχ ἔκο[ύσ]ιον κακόν.
 ἔχει γὰρ οὐδὲν εἰκός· ἐς τί γὰρ βοός
 βλέψασ' ἐδήχθην θυμὸν αἰσχίστηι νόσῳ;
 ὡς εὐπρεπῆς μὲν ἐν πέπλοισιν ἦν ἰδεῖν,
 πυρρῆς δὲ χαίτης καὶ παρ' ὀμμάτων σέλας
 οἰνωπὸν ἐξέλαμπε περ[καί]νων γένυν;
 οὐ μὴν δέμας γ' εὐρ[υ]θμον ὧδε ν]υμφίου·
 τοιῶνδε λέκτρο[ν εἶνεκ' εἰς] πεδοστιβῆ
 ῥινὸν καθισ[]ται; (fr. 472e, vv. 10–18, ed. Kannicht 2004)

¹¹ English translation by M. J.

¹² For an edition of the fragments and testimonies as well as their contextualization, see Kannicht (2004, 502–515).

I feel pain, but I did not want this evil.
For this does not make sense. For how could a bull
that I looked at, bite my heart with most shameful disease?
How pretty was his look in his garments,
his sandy-haired mane and his radiant eyes,
and wine-red flashed his fluffy beard on his chin?
Not at all was beautiful the body of this bridegroom
And for such bed's sake I went down in this foot walking
cow-skin []?¹³

Pasiphaë's apology in these verses proves that after her love-sickness she has become sane again and therefore can employ bitter irony. The verses 10–12 recapitulate her desire for the bull which she now interprets as a “most shameful disease” inflicted on her by a vengeful deity. The verses 13–15 ironically reproach the image of a sexually attractive bull, but also reveal her former state of mind, which she now recognizes as abominable. Verses 16–18 return to a more reason-lead Pasiphaë complaining about her former “tragic” blindness. Once again looking back at the origin of her newborn hybrid baby, she hints at the guile with which Daedalus¹⁴ constructed a wooden cow, in which Pasiphaë could cunningly succeed in having intercourse with the object of her desire.

In addition to the even more famous Medea, the Roman poet Ovid also chose the fatal Pasiphaë as one of his intertextual heroines. In both cases, he adapted and “Romanized” a notoriously “bad woman”, modelled by a Euripidean tragedy. And as Euripides went one chronological step backwards behind his literary predecessor Bacchylides, Ovid likewise glances chronologically behind Euripides' *Cretans*. In his *Ars amatoria*, he employs Pasiphaë's excessive erotic desire for the “Mister Bull” of Crete as a mythological paradigm to illustrate his amatory precepts.¹⁵ In order to encourage the internal male addressee of the first book of the *Ars*, who is presented as shy and lacking self-confidence, the *praeceptor amoris* refers to Pasiphaë as an example of exceeding female sexual passion (*furiosa libido*):

Pasiphaë fieri gaudebat adultera tauri;
invida formosas oderat illa boves.

¹³ English translation by M. J.

¹⁴ For a full account of the relevant sources concerning this mythical artisan *par excellence*, see Frontisi-Ducroux (1975).

¹⁵ For a short commentary and survey of literary ancestors see Adrian S. Hollis (1977, 93–97, esp. 93): “Ovid's chief model [...] lay in *Eclogue* 6.45 ff. Virgil there writes in a neoteric style, delicately blending sentiment with irony; our poet, no doubt intentionally, turns these elements into broad farce and even black humour”. For further reading, see also Wildberger (1998, 90–95) and Dimundo (2003, 132–136).

nota cano: non hoc, centum quae sustinet urbes,
 quamvis sit mendax, Creta negare potest.
 [...] it comes armentis, nec ituram cura moratur
 coniugis, et Minos a bove victus erat.
 Quo tibi, Pasiphaë, pretiosas sumere vestes?
 ille tuus nullas sentit adulter opes.
 [...] hanc tamen implevit, vacca *deceptus* acerna,
 dux gregis, et partu proditus auctor erat. (1.295–298; 301–304; and 325–326;
 emphasis added)

Pasiphaë rejoiced in betraying her husband with the bull;
 she was jealous and hated all the beautiful cows.
 Well-known is my song; with all the hundred cities it sustains,
 although this island is mendacious, Crete cannot deny this.
 [...] She [Pasiphaë] accompanies the cattle, never delayed by concern
 of her husband, and Minos is defeated by a bull.
 Wherefore, Pasiphaë, do you put on precious clothes?
 This one, your adulterer, has no sense for the worth.
 [...] This woman [Pasiphaë] was nevertheless filled, thanks to the deceit
 of the wooden cow, by the leader of the herd, and the birth revealed
 who had done it.¹⁶

The Minoan mythological paradigm in Ovid's *Ars* offers the “erotic” background of the hybrid offspring. The final couplet (1.325–326) is a dense compendium of the Euripidean tragedy. Daedalus' wooden cow enables Pasiphaë to conceive the Minotaur and give birth to him. The hybrid baby, however, suddenly reveals the *auctor*, i.e. the bull as the father as well as Daedalus as the ingenious constructor of Pasiphaë's metamorphic machine.

While the famous hybrid nature of the Minotaur is remarkably suppressed here, Ovid is elsewhere characteristically fond of inventively expressing the superhuman and monstrous phenomenon with his proper genius of elegiac or epic verse, for example:¹⁷

Daedalus, ut clausit conceptum crimine matris
semibovemque virum semivirumque bovem...
 (*Ars* 2.23–24; emphasis added)

Daedalus, who locked in the offspring of maternal crime
 the half-bull man and half-man bull...¹⁸

¹⁶ English translation by M. J.

¹⁷ Similarly Ovid, *Heroides* 4.55–58, esp. 58 (“enixa est utero crimen onusque suo”/ “she gave birth to the accusation and burden of herself”) and *Fasti* 3.497–500.

¹⁸ English translation by M. J.

The striking moral and psychological ambivalence of the myth is concentrated by Ovid in this programmatic mythological paradigm at the beginning of the *Ars* book 2¹⁹ with refreshing linguistic artistry (criticized as manneristic by contemporaries),²⁰ which exhibits the innovative potential of his “postmodernistic” adaptations of the myth.

In his *opus magnum*, the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid continues the Cretan story he began to tell in the *Ars*. Following the path of anachronistic familiarization of mythical paradigms, he contrasts the “shame” regarding the hybrid stepson of Minos with the king’s triumph through his military victory over Athens and Aegean Greece in book 8:²¹

creverat opprobrium generis, foedumque patebat
matris adulterium *monstri novitate biformis*;
destinat hunc Minos thalamo remove pudorem
multiplicique domo caecisque includere tectis.
Daedalus ingenio fabrae celeberrimus artis
ponit opus turbatque notas et lumina flexum. [...] *Quo postquam geminam tauri iuvenisque figuram*
clausit, et *Actaeo bis pastum sanguine monstrum*
tertia sors annis domuit repetita novenis,
utque ope virginea nullis iterata priorum
ianua difficilis filo est inventa relecto
protinus Aegides rapta Minoide Diam
vela dedit comitemque suam crudelis in illo
litore destituit. (vv. 155–160; 169–176; emphasis added)

Grown had the reproach of the offspring and thus appeared
the ugly adultery of its mother through the novelty of the twofold monster.
Minos is determined to remove this shame from his bedchamber
and to lock it in a manifold house with blind rooms.
Daedalus, world famous genius in artful craftsmanship,
sets up this work and confuses the signs. [...].
After the double shape of bull and young man
was locked there and the monster, nourished two times by Attic blood,
was defeated by the third tributes after nine years each
and when, with the help of a maiden, the intricate entrance,

¹⁹ For the context and interpretation of the passage, see Janka (1997, 57–64, with broad discussion of relevant issues of special research).

²⁰ Cf. the anecdote delivered by Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae* 2.2.12, where the pentameter of Ovid’s *Ars* 2.23–24 is one of the examples that should prove Ovid’s self-conscious lexic *licentia*, especially “in carminibus, in quibus non ignoravit vitia sua sed amavit” (“in his poems in which he was not unaware of his flaws but loved them”, trans. M. J.).

²¹ See the commentary of Bömer (1977, 57–66, with a thorough presentation of *loci similes* and mythographical evidence).

passed by no one twice before, was found again by unrolling the thread, at once Aegeus' son abducted Minos' daughter and sailed away to Dia (Naxos), where his companion was cruelly left behind by him at the shore.²²

In the above passage, Ovid uses the Minotaur as a means of double deconstruction of traditional (epic) heroism:

- 1) Minos' military heroism is weirdly undermined by the disturbing and painful family story which follows the adultery of his wife Pasiphaë with the bull.
- 2) Theseus' heroic victory over the hybrid monster, which bestows lifelong glory on him as the saviour of the Attic youth, is carefully concealed by Ovid quasi in Daedalus' Labyrinth: in v. 171 the hero himself remains unnoticed, and is only included in the group of young Athenians designed as the third tribute to the monster. Not until the aftermath of his success is he referred to, and merely by the antonomastic patronymicon *Aegides* (8.174), whereas his companion and helper, Ariadne (cf. 8.172–173), emerges as the actual heroine. But instead of being praised and rewarded, she is left alone by the extremely ungrateful Theseus amidst the uncivilized island of Dia/Naxos.

In Greek and Roman literature, the Minotaur was already being used as a vehicle and marker for multiple poetic and ethic transformation processes. This instrumentalization has been brought to a new peak in our postmodern times. To compare the following (post-)modern versions of myth with the ancient versions interpreted above, let us first extract a bundle of mythical elements from the narratives alongside the theory of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1977, 226–254). This bundle of ancient mythological “megatext” about the Minotaur will then be compared with the (post-)modern version in order to get an idea of the intricate transformation process. A synopsis of this kind also allows new insights into the system of values and norms which are conveyed to millions of young readers by these reminiscences to classical literature and culture.

As we have shown above, the Minotaur myth has a prominent position as an “intermedium”²³ in book 8 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8.152–181). In the context of his *Theseis*, the poet gives prominence to the Minotaur in his *carmen perpetuum*, in which he focuses on the pre-Trojan generation of heroes, as Markus Janka and Michael Stierstorfer point out (2015, 29). Also, Edward Tripp's lexicographic standard-version refers to the *Metamorphoses* as the main source and retells the myth in the following way: after the victory of Crete over Athens, Minos demands, every nine years, seven boys and seven girls as tributes for the Minotaur, the bull-human being, who is the extramarital son of his wife, queen Pasiphaë. For earlier, she had committed adultery with a strong bull. One day,

²² English translation by M. J.

²³ For the term and interpretation of the passage cf. Tsitsiou-Chelidoni (2003, 123–4). Similarly Bömer (1977, 57), who stresses the presumably “transitory” function of the passage (“Übergang zu den weiteren Erzählungen um Daedalus”).

Theseus is voluntarily (as this corresponds to his heroic spirit) selected as a tribute, to finish the bloody violence against young people, and so he descends into the dark Labyrinth. With the help of the famous thread of Ariadne, he does not get lost in the maze and kills the monster with his fists. After that heroic act, he sails with his love interest, Ariadne, back to Athens, but leaves her at the island of Naxos (Tripp 2012, 349–350 and 512–514).

According to the standard-version of Tripp, the following bundle of features of the Minotaur-myth can be distilled:

1. The Minotaur is the son of queen Pasiphaë and a bull.
2. Athens' defeat against Crete in war.
3. Every nine years, seven boys and girls are selected as tributes.
4. Theseus is a volunteer-tribute.
5. The thread of Ariadne as a signpost through the maze.
6. Theseus is the vanquisher of the Minotaur with the help of his fists (Tripp 2012, 349–350 and 512–514).

Within the wide range of transformations of the figure of the Minotaur in (post-)modern literature and film, the following trends can be pointed out:

- a) Transformation from a locked dungeon-monster to a free robber.
- b) Transformation from a bull-being to a werewolf.
- c) Transformation from a man-eater to a vegetarian helper.

- a) Transformation from a locked dungeon-monster to a free robber

In the novel *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* (2005), Percy, his mother, and the Satyr Grover are attacked on their dangerous way to Camp Half-Blood by the Minotaur. This hybrid creature mugs Percy and his friends and does not only throw the car of Percy's stepfather Gabe through the air, but also abducts Percy's mother, Sally, into the Underworld. After having smashed the Minotaur against a tree, Percy breaks one of his horns and kills him by stabbing him with the sharp horn into his side. In this version, the Minotaur observes the demigod Percy just like a robber on the roadside would, and tries to keep him from moving forward to Camp Half-Blood. It is, however, not clear who sent the Minotaur. Due to Cronos being the antagonist of the demigods in the novel, it is probable that he wanted to injure the offspring of the Olympians by evoking the bull-headed man. Riordan briefly notes (2006, 50) that the Minotaur is the son of Pasiphaë (feature 1).

In the film version of *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* (2010), the character of the Minotaur similarly gets in contact with Percy and his friends. The plot of the film closely follows that of the novel. After an accident with the car caused by the Minotaur throwing a calf onto the street, the protagonists run away. Spinning the car at Percy and his friends, the monster misses them. Soon after that, there is a fight between Percy and the bull-headed man at a silvan glade near Camp Half-Blood. At first, the Minotaur grabs Sally with his big paw and sends her into the Underworld; Percy's mother is absorbed by dust and

vanishes. After that Percy takes revenge on the Minotaur, who falls onto a tree and gets his horn stuck in the bark. When he tries to pull it out, the horn breaks, Percy moves fast and gets the horn by pulling it out of the bark.²⁴ With this item, he pierces the monster and thus defeats it (cf. Columbus 2010, 00:16:32–00:19:30). In the film, the Minotaur, contrary to the book, is sent by the dark god Hades, who regards Percy as the thief of the lightning bolt. The film only transports one part of the feature 1 of the bundle, as the Minotaur is presented as a hybrid of man and bull. Apart from that, the mythological Minotaur is reduced to a brutal monster.

b) Transformation from a bull-being to a werewolf

The first volume of the series *The Hunger Games* (2008) by the American author Suzanne Collins (b. 1962) differs from the ancient standard version of the Cretan myths because no bull-headed man emerges in the text, but other horrible hybrid creatures are implanted in the following plot line: in preparation for the next Hunger Games of the North American fictional country, Panem, in which boys and girls are sent into a dark and dangerous fighting arena similar to the myth of the Attic tributes, Katniss's younger sister, Primrose, short Prim, is drawn as tribute. When Katniss sees that Prim is elected, she wants to replace her voluntarily, because she wants to protect her. Therefore, after a longer training phase, she is brought into an arena which is constructed like a maze. In this place, monitored with countless cameras, the tributes are forced to fight against each other to death. At the end, Katniss and Peeta are declared the winners of the 74th edition of the Hunger Games, after having together killed computer generated hybrids of wolf and man. These monsters are shown as creepy reincarnations of the fallen tributes.

Even though the first volume does not contain explicit hints at the myth of the Minotaur, in an implicit way, five features of the bundle mentioned above can be detected, though *à rebours*: Katniss does not meet the Minotaur, but a similar hybrid creature conflated of wolf and man, who is not biologically real, but computer-generated (variation of feature 1). This looks like a new variation of the werewolf, a monster well established in the genre of fantasy. But this werewolf is more than a single hybrid creature. When a pack of them approaches, Katniss notices by watching their eyes and face, that these are monstrous revenants of the fallen tributes who are “programmed” to despise the faces of Katniss and Peeta, because they are still alive, whereas they were murdered in cold blood.

Therefore, the text allows for the interpretation that tyrannical systems are not afraid of dishonouring the corpses of their enemies. These ugly scenes in the

²⁴ This fight adapts Hercules' fight against the river-god Achelous who is his rival suitor in the competition for the marriage with Deianira, cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 9.1–88, esp. 82–86.

novel remind us of the cruel fights of Roman gladiators (Collins 2009). In this adaptation, Athens has not lost a war against Crete (feature 2), but the twelve districts were defeated by the Capitol in a rebellion. The Capitol is the main district of the country Panem, where the ruling quasi-aristocratic society lives under the rule of the tyrant Coriolanus Snow. Furthermore, not only every nine years, seven boys and seven girls are sent into the Labyrinth (feature 3), but every single year, twelve boys and twelve girls who have reached their twelfth birthday and are not older than eighteen are selected as tributes. Since the Hunger Games take place more often than in the myth and because of the higher number of tributes, the suffering of the districts is more intense compared to the suffering of Athens in the standard version. In this adaptation, the voluntary tribute is not the Attic prince Theseus (feature 4), but the tough girl Katniss, who replaces her younger and weaker sister to prevent her certain death. In this case, Katniss is presented like Theseus, a messianic figure, who fights to set an end to tyranny and rescue people from their distress. While Theseus achieves this by his victory over the Minotaur, it is not enough for Katniss to win the Hunger Games once and destroy their rules. She has to fight against a crop of monstrous revenants, who can be regarded as innovative versions of werewolves, created with the help of digital animation. But she kills those hybrid creatures not with her fists as Theseus (reversal of feature 6), but with the accuracy of her arrows. Here, there is no need for Ariadne's thread (no feature 5) since the underground of the arena is designed like a maze resembling, e.g., the "catacombs" of the Colosseum.

The film *The Hunger Games* (2012, dir. Gary Ross) follows the plot of the novel closely. Therefore, we find the same mythological features as in the book. The only difference is that the werewolf mutants, created by computer technicians with the help of futuristic 3D techniques, are reduced to mere wolf hybrids. They show no similarity with the previously killed tributes (cf. Ross 2012, 01:59:24–02:06:38).

These two examples can illustrate that the modernization of the myth of the Minotaur is used as a vehicle to criticize tyranny, which democratic civilization regards as a threat to its values.

The impression that the novels and films about *The Hunger Games* are closely connected with the myth of the Minotaur is confirmed by Sophie Mills. She claims that the arena of the Hunger Games is a variation of the classical maze and the werewolf hybrid creatures are, in her opinion, reincarnations of the Minotaur:

The arena in which the contestants are trapped is a kind of vast labyrinth, full of dangers, since it pits the Tributes against its inhospitable climate, against attacks from man-made fireballs (Collins 2008, 174), creatures such as poisonous mutant wasps (185), and most of all, against one another in a liminal and unstable world, which is both highly technological and a primitive wilderness, a world in which the status of predator and prey is continually shifting. At the book's remarkably

gory climax, the three remaining tributes are attacked by human/animal hybrids evoking the Minotaur (331–4), although these are biped wolves with human eyes, the resurrected incarnations of the previously dead tributes. (Mills 2015, 56–57)

Furthermore, in an interview, Collins reveals that she had Greek mythology in mind when creating her famous novels, and that she was particularly familiar with the myth of the Minotaur since she was a child (DeMonico and Barber 2012, 9).

c) Transformation from a man-eater to a vegetarian helper

In a completely different way, the myth of the Minotaur is varied in the German novel *Die Irrfahrer* [The Wanderers, 2007]. The Bavarian author Gerd Scherm (b. 1950) follows Ovid's paths more radically and transforms the myth in a way that the standard version of the Minotaur as a cannibalistic beast shall be revealed as a farce. The anti-hero Theseus is determined to search for the harmless creature and kill it. But his love interest Ariadne, the sister of the Minotaur, in this case named Asterion,²⁵ is determined to prevent him from that deed. Therefore, Theseus tries hard to convince her to help him. He confesses that his endeavour to kill the incriminated hybrid creature is meant to make him a real superhero and the ruler of the Island of Crete. But Ariadne insists on her family relations:

“Aber Asterion ist doch mein Bruder. Und er tut niemandem etwas zuleide.” “Das glaubt doch keiner außer dir, und es ist auch völlig egal. Wichtig ist, was die ganze Welt denkt. Und die Welt denkt, dass der Minotaurus ein kinderverschlingendes Ungeheuer ist. Das ist die Realität!” (182)

“But Asterion is my brother, after all. And he does no harm to anybody.” “Nobody believes that except for you, and it does not matter at all. What matters, is what all the world believes. And all the world believes that the Minotaur is a child-devouring monster. That's reality!”²⁶

By these utterings of Theseus, Scherm shows in a parodistic way, how the myth of the Minotaur might have come into existence: with cheap sensationalism from the common folk. In their simplistic point of view, an unknown and different being must always be blood-seeking and bad. Ariadne, who is able to differentiate and who knows the real person behind the surface of the bull-headed man, begs the selfish hero, who wants to annex Crete and be the ruler of the island by marrying her, not to hurt her hybrid brother Asterion. She affirms that, as a vegetarian, Asterion would not bring harm to anybody. Nevertheless,

²⁵ For the origin and function of this individual name in the history of the legend, cf. Poland (1932, 1929).

²⁶ English translation by M. J.

she gives Theseus the famous thread because she loves him. Theseus, who is portrayed as selfish and reckless, does not pay any attention to her requests, but is keen to attack the protagonist Seshmosis, a learned scribe and wandering character, inspired by Moses and Odysseus, and the harmless and kind Minotaur with his sword. During this bullfight, Theseus gets impaled and is thrown against the wall and he passes out. In this modern version, the Minotaur helps the prophet Seshmosis, who wants to prevent Theseus from crowning himself and becoming the new cruel king of Crete. Shortly afterwards, the god GON (= God without Name) from the Old Testament, called by Seshmosis, suddenly appears as *deus ex machina*, destroys the Labyrinth and sets the imprisoned Minotaur free so that he can lead a better life in the hills of Crete, where people worship bulls as gods. After that, Theseus leaves the Labyrinth and announces untruthfully that he has defeated the Minotaur. When he is therefore criticized by his companion Nelos on their return to Athens, Theseus apologizes for his lie in the following way:

Es zählt nur, was die Menschen für wahr halten. Die Realität spielt überhaupt keine Rolle. *Ich* bin aus dem Labyrinth zurückgekehrt, und der Minotaur ist verschwunden. Also ist *meine* Version der Geschichte die Wahrheit. Außerdem brauchen Menschen Helden. (Scherm 2007, 206)

The only thing that counts is what people believe to be true. Reality does not matter at all. *I* returned from the Labyrinth and the Minotaur vanished. Therefore, *my* version of history is the truth. Also, human beings need heroes.

In this version, Scherm changes or “corrects”²⁷ the core of the myth to achieve parodistic effects and moral reflections: the Minotaur is not blamed as a blood-seeking monster, but Theseus is. He is not stopped by anything in his zeal to obtain fame and has no problem with the marriage of convenience with Ariadne, for whom he pretends to have feelings of love (cf. Scherm 2007, 152–205).

Scherm integrates three mythological features in a liberal way: “his” Minotaur is, as in the standard version, the son of the queen Pasiphaë and a bull (feature 1). The Minotaur is, however, not described as an enemy, but as a friend, who supports the protagonist, Seshmosis, as an effective animal helper on his way to becoming a real hero. Furthermore, in Scherm’s version, Athens has not lost a war against Crete nor does Theseus have to go to Crete as tribute, but he travels to Crete in order to extend his power by marrying the princess of Crete. In this adaptation, no Athenian boys and girls are sacrificed (feature 3) to the Minotaur, but the maze functions as a prison for serious offenders. In Scherm’s version, Theseus is no heroic and voluntary tribute (feature 4), but a glory-seeking careerist, who does everything to gain power. Theseus is presented as a

²⁷ For the concept of “correction of myth”, see Vöhler, Seidensticker, and Emmerich (2005).

negative social climber. In this way, Scherm devalues demigods and emphasizes their often selfish and problematic characters. In this way, the text advocates an ambivalent conception of man, which gives priority to the mistakes of heroes. In times of a capitalist “elbow-society”, careerist human beings, who want to climb up, inconsiderate of society, are mirrored by this deconstructed Theseus. In Scherm’s version, the thread of Ariadne is used by Theseus as a help for orientation as in the myth (feature 5). But suddenly he notices that one of the mad persons imprisoned there has cut it through (Scherm 2007, 196). In this adaptation, Theseus does not kill the Minotaur with his fists, but it is the Minotaur who defeats Theseus. The Athenian prince is lost in the Labyrinth until GON opens the maze and allows him to escape with his companions (Scherm 2007, 202).

Conclusion: The Curious Transformations of the Minotaur in Children’s Media: Desexualization and Fairy-tale-like Modification of the Myth

It can be concluded that the sexual aspect regarding the conception of the Minotaur, emphasized especially in Ovid’s *Ars* and *Metamorphoses*, is hidden and deleted by adapting this myth for children’s media. In this way, important features of the myth get lost, although they would have been necessary for a deeper understanding. Furthermore, the Minotaur is transformed from an ambivalent royal creature into a one-dimensional fairy-tale figure. Thus, in *Percy Jackson*, he is drawn as a robber like in the fairy tale *Die Bremer Stadtmusikanten* [Town Musicians of Bremen; cf. Grimm 2011, 343–346; KHM²⁸ 27]. In *The Hunger Games*, there is a metamorphosis of the Minotaur into a werewolf. A prototype of a werewolf also emerges in the fairy tale *Das Rotkäppchen* [Little Red Riding Hood; cf. Grimm 2011, 284–287; KHM 26]. At least in the novel *Die Irrfahrer* the Minotaur is changed in a positive way. He is transformed into an animal helper for the protagonist as, e.g., in the fairy tale *Der gestiefelte Kater* [Puss in Boots; cf. Grimm 2011, 289–293; KHM 33].

In summary, it can be said that the Minotaur is transformed dichotomously either into a bad antagonist or into a good helper, as in fairy-tale stories (cf. Propp 1972, 84–86). The figure of the hybrid monster is thus familiarized for a young readership less acquainted with Greek and Roman mythology, who are more familiar with fairy tales due to their early literary socialization. To prevent children from crudeness and obscenity, in all the examined texts the story of the fathering of the Minotaur is totally avoided. Therefore, all those novels establish rather neoconservative values and norms (cf. Stierstorfer 2016, 403–414). In this respect, postmodern authors differ remarkably from their “postmodernist” ancestor Ovid.

²⁸ *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*.

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Familiar Monsters: Modern Greek Children Face the *Minotavros*, *Idra*, and *Kerveros*

It is no surprise that Modern Greek children are well acquainted with ancient history and mythology. I have commented elsewhere on the role and place of ancient history and culture in the Greek school curriculum (Kordos 2016). In this cursory paper I will cast a glance at the relationship between mythology and books for children mainly by scrutinizing the depiction of three monsters: the Minotaur, Hydra, and Cerberus (*Minotavros*, *Idra*, *Kerveros*). The choice of monsters is by no means accidental: all of them are well-known, characteristic, and very distinct from one another. All of them serve as adversaries to heroes, but there are several important differences between their appearance, their lives, and their place in Greek mythology. While two of the monsters – the Hydra and Cerberus – belong to Heracles' circle of myths and are connected with the Peloponnese, Minotaur is from Crete and from the myth of Theseus. Two of them meet a bloody end at the hands of heroes (or rather at the swords of these heroes), while the third one, Cerberus is caught, presented to Eurystheus, and let loose. Two of them are hybrid animal monstrosities: giant cross-breeds and multiplications (the three heads of Cerberus and seven – at least initially – heads of Hydra), while the Minotaur is clearly anthropomorphic. Two of them – the Hydra and Minotaur – are supposed to be evil, as they slay humans, but Cerberus is merely a guardian, a faithful watchdog that simply does its job.

For the present, approximate survey of the subject, I have chosen several children's books written recently originally by Greek authors (i.e. not translated from other languages) that would provide a hint of the strategy for telling the stories of these monsters and presenting them to children in Modern Greece.

Myths and the Modern Greeks

Myths as seen by a Modern Greek child can be viewed in more diverse and richer ways than by other, non-Greek children. Firstly, myths play the role of fairy tales, a role that would be universal and spread to other nations, too, but only Greek children are taught that these myths belong to their national heritage and – quite surprisingly – according to the Greek school education they can be

regarded as a type of pre-history: in historical textbooks mythical stories precede lessons on the Minoans or Mycenaeans (cf., e.g., Maistellis, Kaliva, and Michail 2017 – the present history book for 10-year-old pupils). Moreover, Greek children are enveloped in a “mythical reality”: the world that surrounds them is filled with diverse allusions to myths. Not only are they present in countless sayings and proverbs preserved in Modern Greek, but also in that fact that many mythical places, such as Pelion, Nemea, Ithaca, or – speaking of the Hydra – Lerna are real designations. Mythical names, symbols, and logotypes are equally omnipresent: children eat yogurt produced by a company named Olympos, drink Hebe-brand soft drinks, and on large scale dress up as heroes for carnival parties, either in chitons or in elements of *panoplia*. Greek children can bear such names as Theseus, Euridiki, Odysseas, or Ariadni, while their parents can be employed by Kerveros Security Systems or Achilleas Hotels and after work they would train at a Minotaur sports club (like the one in Cretan town of Chania).

In one of the most frequented and well-stocked bookshops in Athens, Politeia, among the shelves with children’s books there exists a special mythology section. When one visits the website of the bookshop (e.g., Politeia 2019) one will easily find more than 600 books in this category, mostly about Greek mythology (not the Norse or Far Eastern) and these books are in large part written – and illustrated – by Greek authors.

Sources

From this abundance I have chosen fourteen books published over the last fifteen years that I found popular, representative, and the same time diverse in the ways that the monsters are depicted:

- Maria Angelidou [auth.], Iris Samartzi [ill.], *H arpagi tou Kerverou / Η αρπαγή του Κερβέρου* [Capturing Cerberus], Athens: Metaichmio, 2014;
- Maria Angelidou [auth.], Iris Samartzi [ill.], *H Lernaia Ydra / Η Λερναία Ύδρα* [The Hydra of Lerna], Athens: Metaichmio, 2016;
- Anna Chatzimanoli [auth.], Michalis Kazazis [ill.], *Thiseas. I pali me ton Minotavro / Θησέας. Η πάλη με τον Μινώταυρο* [Theseus: The Fight with the Minotaur], Athens: Kirki, 2004;
- Dimitris Kerasidis [auth. and ill.], *Oi Athloi tou Irakli / Οι Άθλοι του Ηρακλή* [The Labours of Heracles], Athens: Malliaris, 2016;
- Filippos Mantilaras [auth.], Natalia Kapatsoulia [ill.], *O Iraklis / Ο Ηρακλής* [Heracles], Athens: Papadopoulos, 2008;
- Filippos Mantilaras [auth.], Natalia Kapatsoulia [ill.], *O Thiseas / Ο Θησέας* [Theseus], Athens: Papadopoulos, 2011;
- Eirini Marra [auth.], Evi Tsaknia [ill.], *Mythika terata / Μυθικά τέρατα* [Mythical Monsters], Athens: Patakis, 2007;

- Katerina Mouriki, Ioanna Kyritsi-Tzioti [auth.], Nestoras Xouris [ill.], *Theseas / Θησέας* [Theseus], Athens: Diaplasi, 2016;
- Alexia Othonaiou [auth. and ill.], *Arkhaia mythika terata / Αρχαία μυθικά τέρατα* [Ancient Mythical Monsters], Athens: Tetragono, 2010;
- Kostas Poulos [auth.], Iris Samartzi [ill.], *Lavyrinthos kai Minotavros / Λαβυρίνθος και Μινώταυρος* [The Labyrinth and the Minotaur], Athens: Metaichmio, 2015;
- Aspasia Protogerou [auth.], Alekos Papadatos [ill.], Annie di Donna [col.], *Theoi, iroes kai terata. Oi peripeteies tou Timou stin elliniki mythologia / Θεοί, ήρωες και τέρατα. Οι περιπέτειες του Τίμου στην ελληνική μυθολογία* [Gods, Heroes, and Monsters: The Adventures of Timos in Greek Mythology], Athens: Polaris, 2016;
- Katerina Servi [auth.], Spiros Kontis [ill.], *Theseas / Θησέας* [Theseus], Athens: Patakis, 2011;
- Sofia Zarabouka [auth. and ill.], *Mythologia. T. 9 / Μυθολογία. Τ. 9* [Mythology. Vol. 9], Athens: Kedros, 2011a;
- Sofia Zarabouka [auth. and ill.], *Mythologia. T. 10 / Μυθολογία. Τ. 10* [Mythology. Vol. 10], Athens: Kedros, 2011b.

I also selected two additional books that would serve as points of reference: comic books published more than half a century ago:¹

- Eleni Papadaki [auth.], Vasilis Zisis [ill.], *O Iraklis / Ο Ηρακλής* [Heracles], series “Klassika Eikonografimena” / “Κλασσικά Εικονογραφημένα” [Classics Illustrated], No. 1069, Athens: Pechlivanidis, [n.d.];
- Vasilis Rotas [auth.], Konstantinos Grammatopoulos [ill.], *O Theseas kai o Minotavros / Ο Θεσέας και ο Μινώταυρος* [Theseus and the Minotaur], series “Klassika Eikonografimena” / “Κλασσικά Εικονογραφημένα” [Classics Illustrated], No. 1007, Athens: Pechlivanidis, [n.d.].

The books I chose to represent stories of the afore-mentioned three monsters fall into one of three categories: they either tell about the deeds of a hero (Heracles or Theseus), they describe a specific monster, or they are a kind of bestiary. There are two cases that fall into two of these categories. The first is Eirini Marra’s book (2007), in which every mentioned monster gets a chapter devoted

¹ “Klassika Eikonografimena” [Κλασσικά Εικονογραφημένα / Classics Illustrated], the first comic series in Greek, started as translations of the “American Classics Illustrated” that were comic retellings of various works of world literature (Dumas, Cooper, Hugo, Dickens, and many others). The Greeks issued the American versions but quickly started adding their own comics on Greek mythology, ancient plays, on Byzantine stories, on episodes from the history of the Greek Revolution and even pictorial retellings of rural songs. The series, still in circulation, formed a basis for the Greek comic scene. Many issues are available online; at the following webpage (MyComics 2019) there is a collection of all the covers divided into thematic groups.

to it and is described through an appropriate myth retold in a vivid form, with dialogues and extensive narration. On the other hand the last part of the book contains a short monster dictionary. The second book matching two categories is that by Aspasia Protogerou (2016), who wrote a story of a contemporary boy, Timos who travels – with help of his tablet – to mythical Greece where he witnesses various myths, most of all those involving monsters. Somehow Timos' tablet allows him to communicate with the heroes he sees. Among others, Timos meets the Minotaur with Theseus and the Hydra with Heracles.

All these books relate to popular myths (Heracles and Theseus seem to be the heroes that are most easily recognizable and their deeds widely known) and focus more on retelling than just telling.² No book has the ambition of being children's first contact with Greek mythology. The texts are therefore largely abridged (especially in books for younger children), sometimes put into verse or a simpler form of the Modern Greek language, but never – from what I noticed – focused on presenting a detailed description of these monsters. Action is what counts and sometimes the description is skipped altogether. I did encounter an interesting example that is inspired by ancient material, but no premise that would allow me to ponder which version of a myth is represented. One of the illustrators, Sofia Zarabouka (2011b), was clearly inspired by an ancient depiction and paints a baby Minotaur in the arms of his mother, similarly to the depiction known from the red-figured kylix coming from the fourth century BC, Vulci, Etruria, and exhibited in the Louvre Museum (No. inv. 1066; cf. Figs. 1 and 2).



Fig. 1: Sofia Zarabouka, Pasiphaë and the young Minotaur, from Sofia Zarabouka, *Mythologia*. Vol. 10. Athens: Kedros, 2011, 9.

² But on the other hand I observed no radical narrative experiments, like the one proposed by Jorge Louis Borges in the short story *The House of Asterion* (1947), where the reader explores the story of Minotaur from the beast's point of view.



Fig. 2: Pasiphaë nursing the Minotaur, red-figured kylix, ca. 340–320 BC, Louvre Museum, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, No. inv. 1066, Wikimedia Commons.

Another illustrator, Iris Samartzi, while depicting the Minotaur, used a picture of the bull's head rhyton from the fifteenth century BC that is on display in the Heracleion Archaeological Museum (No. inv. AE 1368). The weight of the story lies less in the text and more in the illustrations, whose artists take the most important decisions regarding a specific book for how to depict a given monster. Therefore, I will almost completely omit texts and focus solely on the pictures, treating the chosen examples as “picture books” (cf. Nodelman 1988; Kress and van Leeuwen 2004; Kiefer 2008; Cackowska 2009a, 2009b, 2009/2010).

Techniques of Depicting Monsters

The three chosen monsters could be cursorily defined in a quite straightforward matter as follows:

- Hydra: a snake multiplied by seven (or eight, nine, ten),
- Cerberus: a bad dog with three heads and possibly a snake-like tail,
- Minotaur: a muscular (sometimes shown as naked) man with the head of an angry bull.

The chosen books represent various artistic approaches to depicting at least one of these mythological monsters. The Minotaur drawn by Spiros Kontis (Servi 2011) is presented in a comical convention. The humorous drawings, probably made with the support of computer applications, verge on parody. Michalis Kazazis' style (Chatzimanoli 2004) is much less obvious. The pictures are simplistic, they consist of contours and employ shapes in a drastically reduced number of colours: the hero is white and blue (an allusion to the Greek national colours?), the monster (Minotaur) brown and black. Evi Tsaknia's pictures (Marra 2007), while quite complicated, are the only ones that are

monochromatic, that is, they are in black and white. Dimitris Kerasidis (2016) to certain extent uses a similar technique to that already observed in the works of Kontis, though the drawings are simplified and devoid of the details of Kontis. The illustrations by Nestoras Xouris (Mouriki and Kyritsi-Tzioti 2016) are in fact watercolour paintings, very colourful and full of details, tilted towards caricature. The drawings by Zarabouka (2011a and 2011b) are of a similar kind – the drawings are in fact oil paintings, slightly impressionist (i.e. fuzzy on detail). The pictures of Samartzi (Angelidou 2014 and 2016; Poulos 2015) take up more space than the text and they are collages, partly painted and partly digitally processed with the use of photographs. Every book illustrated by Samartzi ends with a section of activities for young readers (crosswords, questions, and various other tasks) and in each one at least one ancient vase depiction is evoked. Alekos Papadatos and Annie di Donna (Protogerou 2016) are known for their works in comics: *Logicomix*, written by Apostolos Doxiadis (Doxiadis and Papadimitriou 2009), a life story of the mathematician and philosopher Bertrand Russell, was translated to more than twenty languages.³ Papadatos and di Donna's next work, *Democracy* (2015), on politics in Ancient Greece, prepared in collaboration with Abraham Kawa, was also warmly greeted by comic fans. In Protogerou's text their drawings show this exact provenance: they are quite realistic, very dynamic, and exceptionally colourful. The works of Natalia Kapatsoulia (Mantilaras 2008 and 2011) are also on the comic-book side, with careful and vivid tempera drawings. Alexia Othonaiou (2010) is the most sketch-like of all – these are in fact drawings, not paintings, that are mounted on a colourful background. Comic books from the “Klassika Eikonografimena” series, evoked as points of reference, present the monsters in a more plain, realistic manner as the execution of the pictures is restricted by the limitations of 1950s printing: the colours and shapes are kept simple and the correspondence between shapes and colours is often inaccurate.

The Minotaur and His Head

The Minotaur is most often presented from Theseus' point of view: readers encounter the monster along with Theseus and therefore the Minotaur is automatically viewed as an evil adversary. The Minotaur is wild, angry, and brutal. He becomes animalish, throwing himself at the hero (Chatzimanoli 2004), towering over people and even producing hot steam from his nostrils (Servi 2011; cf. Fig. 3). Papadatos and di Donna's version (Protogerou 2016) is the most “pop-like” as their idea of the monster is a huge bull having a vaguely human form, not unlike a Marvel superhero Hulk, whose colour is not green but dark brown.

³ See the webpage on the book, the subpage on international editions (Doxiadis 2008–2009).



Fig. 3: Theseus and Minotaur, from Spiros Kontis, *Theseas*, Athens: Patakis, 2011, 23.

The depicting of a slashing sword and squirting blood is also present (Chatzimanoli 2004, but cf. the bloodless brutality of a much earlier depiction in Rotas [n.d.], cover), though several sources offer alternatives to such imagery, as in Katerina Mouriki and Ioanna Kyritsi-Tzioti's version (2016), where there is no weapon but Theseus' fists and no blood (cf. Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca: Epitome* 1.9). Another similar scene is that of the Minotaur kneeling and being stabbed in the head by Theseus (again with no visible blood, Zarabouka 2011b). This depiction is actually the one often found on ancient vases. Marra's book (2007, 158) does not show it as such but contains a description of a similar scene of the Minotaur kneeling and waiting for the final blow. Zarabouka also lets us see the Minotaur's childhood, as a bull-baby in the arms of Pasiphaë, an image that is, as already mentioned, inspired directly by an ancient depiction. As the book of Othonaiou (2010) is a type of monster bestiary and not a narrative, she is not bound by the fight scene, though her version's monster is unexpectedly scary, as it is huge, in fact many times bigger than the surrounding humans, and it shows sharp teeth (as if bulls had the teeth of a carnivore). Kapatsoulia (Mantilaras 2011) chooses a more symbolic approach, imaging the Minotaur as a man that seems to be wearing a bull's mask resulting in the whole, final scene in the Labyrinth suddenly taking on a theatrical look (cf. Fig. 4).⁴ Her idea is quite

⁴ I focus on the illustrations I have found the most representative for the batch of books that serve as example in the present chapter.

similar to the one present in Kostas Poulos (2015), where Samartzi makes the Minotaur wear an artefact (a mask), an actual exhibit from a museum (cf. Fig. 5).



Fig. 4: Natalia Kapatsoulia, Theseus, the Minotaur and the Labyrinth, from Filippos Mantilaras, *O Theseas*, Athens: Papadopoulos, 2011, 6–7.



Fig. 5: Iris Samartzi, The Minotaur in a mask, from Kostas Poulos, *Labyrinthos kai Minotavros*, Athens: Metaichmio, 2015, cover.

It seems that the head of the monster draws the most attention; here the place for invention, the monster's trademark is. Xouris (Mouriki and Kyritsi-Tzioti 2016) makes use of it by depicting the Minotaur in the shape of a cloud encountered by Theseus' ship on the way to Crete (cf. Fig. 6, next page). The only other detail

that I have seen is the tail in Tsaknia's drawing (Marra 2007): bifurcated and surprisingly abounding in detail.



Fig. 6: Nestoras Xouris, A cloud in the shape of the Minotaur, from Katerina Mouriki and Ioanna Kyritsi-Tzioti, *Thiseas*, Athens: Diaplasi, 2016, 29.

The Hydra: A Snake or Dragon?

The Hydra is much less human and therefore, unlike the Minotaur, it does not fall into the trap of the “Uncanny Valley”.⁵ As it is constructed from animals otherwise repulsive to men (snakes), its depiction is more straightforward. It is simply a bundle of snake heads and bodies (Zarabouka 2011a) or – like in the case of Filippos Mantilaras (2008) – a group of mildly baffled heads (but, oddly, having human-like facial expressions), not scary but entertaining (cf. Fig. 7).

In Marra's book the Hydra is mentioned in the chapter entitled *I nerofida tis Lernis / Η νεροφίδα της Λέρνης* [The Water-Snake of Lerna] and the drawing indeed depicts exactly this, an entangled bundle of nine snakes, with vicious-looking heads extending bifurcated tongues. The description is curious, because this part of the Heracleian myth is retold partly through the eyes of the Hydra itself. The fight is at some point joined by an enormous crab sent by Hera. In the dictionary (2007, 214) it is mentioned that the Hydra's heads spat fire and that they could poison everything. Maria Angelidou's book is solely devoted to the

⁵ A widely-discussed concept from the realm of robotics describing an uneasy feeling that a human being develops towards androids that are similar but not quite identical to humans, cf. Taylor (2016).

Hydra, but the monster appears only after the midpoint of the text (2016, 16 and then 18–19, 22–23) envisaged by Samartzi in the shape of a being with several shapeless heads that look more like giant, brown-grey leeches than a snake or a dragon. Mouths and eyes are only suggested. Curiously, the giant crab also appears (20–21).

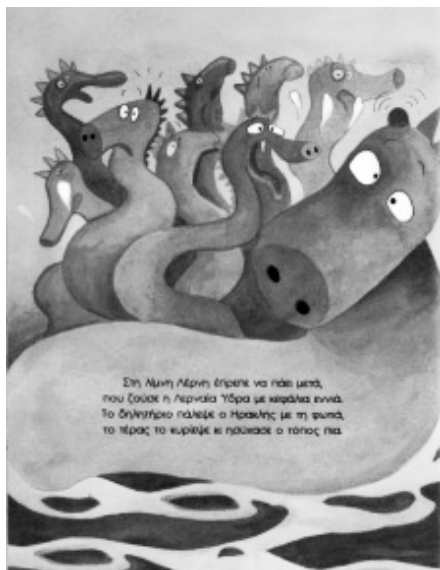


Fig. 7: Natalia Kapatsoulia, Hydra's baffled heads, from Filippou Mantilaras, *O Iraklis*, Athens: Papadopoulos, 2008, 8.

In Papadatos and di Donna's vision (Protogerou 2016) the Hydra is present on four separate pictures. First we can observe its body (104), not unlike a thin, green Chinese-style dragon, with wide and deep mouths filled with sharp teeth. Then (108–109) Heracles is shown as he cuts off one of the Hydra's heads and in turn (111) burns with fire its headless lump of a torso. Finally (112), he throws down a huge boulder that will cover the Hydra's last, immortal head that for now is half-buried in the ground by the lake (cf. Fig. 8). Throughout the text relating to Heracles' and Iolaus' fight with the monster, the Hydra is described simply as a snake (*fidi* / φύδι).

Othonaiou's idea is complex (2010): she draws the Hydra as a combination of snakes with bifurcated, poisoned tongues (an arrow points at one of them with the label *dilitirio* / δηλητήριο, 'poison') and a scaled, multi-headed dragon whose heads have bull-like horns.



Fig. 8: Alekos Papadatos and Annie di Donna, The end of the Hydra, from Aspasia Protopogerou, *Theoi, iroes kai terata*, Athens: Polaris, 2016, 112.

The older comics (Papadaki [n.d.]), evoked here as a point of reference, are much more direct and similar to what Papadatos had in mind: they show a type of dragon body, with a hint of a scaly exterior, with many aggressive heads and extended forked tongues (cf. Fig. 9). As for the number of heads themselves, the Hydra's depictions are always fragmentary, because the artists suggest there is more of the monster's body than the reader can see. Therefore, they do not have to decide how many heads the Hydra had or in which moment of Heracles' battle with the Hydra the picture "was taken". As with the Minotaur, the Hydra is depicted always during the fight with the hero.



Fig. 9: Vasilis Zisis, Heracles and Hydra, from Eleni Papadaki, *O Iraklis*, Athens: Pechlivanidis, [n.d.], 15.

Cerberus: Little Room for Invention?

The story about Cerberus gives the least room for imagination. The creature appears briefly and is only crudely defined (as a three-headed dog). Almost all its depictions are exactly that. A mere two are a little different: Samartzi (Angelidou 2014) depicts Cerberus (16, 18, and 20) as a monster with three dog-like heads: green, purple, and cyan, while snakes emerge from its bulky nape and its tail is pointy and covered with thorns. The drawing of Tsaknia in *Mythika terata* by Marra (2007), very simple, shows a black three-headed dog wearing collars, shaped as snakes. In this monster bestiary Cerberus is depicted and described as having a reptile-like tail (213).

In depicting Cerberus there is also less room for showing violent actions: instead we sometimes have Heracles trying to tame a leashed (or even chained) animal, not unlike contemporary dog-owners. Othonaiou plays with the idea that the various heads can think different things: while two heads are angrily barking, the third thinks dreamily of food (more specifically toasted bread). There is also a cosy dog-house present (cf. Fig. 10). Here too the authors of the depictions choose the same moment of the story, namely when Cerberus is being led by Heracles on a leash and – rarely – being presented by the hero to the horrified Eurystheus.



Fig. 10: Alexia Othonaiou, Cerberus, from Alexia Othonaiou, *Arkhaia mythika terata*, Athens: Tetragono, 2010, 12–13.

An Attempt at a Hypothesis

The basic choice that all the artists faced was whether to make a particular monster scary or funny. Only in the case of Othonaiou were both options chosen: while Othonaiou's image itself is scary, the comments and additional drawings ("doodles"), like comic-like text balloons, collages, and various scribbled "unfinished" notes defuse this initial scariness. We might establish a basic division based on whether a monster is:

- naturalistically depicted⁶ / scary / brutal or aggressive,
- abstractly drawn / funny / tamed or domesticated.

The first, “naturalistic” approach seems to be more traditional or even old-fashioned, the other, “abstract” approach – modern and contemporary: if we choose to tell an old story in a new and yet captivating (or well-received, or correct) way, something must be changed. Moreover, such changes that move away from a brutality of images in children’s literature and saturate them with humour, are part of an author’s/artist’s strategy to dismiss the gory detail that sometimes permeates the mythical story and conceal it from young and therefore sensitive readers – not unlike the later versions of the brothers Grimm’s tales devoid of more controversial details.

One unifying way to look at these changes and tendencies is to treat the discussed depiction through the prism of the term “defamiliarization”.⁷ Here children’s literature shares the concerns of speculative literature, as the latter seeks to bring a reader into a new, invented (and often unfamiliar), eerie, and hostile world. Darko Suvin, an important theoretician of science fiction literature, built his theory of this literature on the notion of “cognitive estrangement” (1979) that drew from the musings of Victor Shklovsky on *ostranenie* and of Bertold Brecht on *Verfremdungseffekt*. Suvin thus described a tension between a science fiction text and readers’ expectations, a tension that results in a certain disorientation of the reader, who with the “story world” finds well-known elements mixed with alien ones – or who is misled by appearances of things, events, or characters that prove different from the initial (implied) assumptions: the familiar world is defamiliarized.

There are generally two opposite strategies an author can employ. The first strategy, present in a science fiction subgenre called *slipstream*, is to start with a literary reality that emulates the non-literary world but eventually proves to be a deception (Sterling 1989). Jorge Luis Borges, regarded as a father of this subgenre, gave once a description of such a tactic in the opening lines to his short story *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius* (originally published in 1940):

Bioy Casares had had dinner with me that evening and we became lengthily engaged in a vast polemic concerning the composition of a novel in the first person, whose narrator would omit or disfigure the facts and indulge in various contradictions which would permit a few readers – very few readers – to perceive an atrocious or banal reality. (1964, 3, trans. D. A. Yates)

⁶ In the case of non-existent monsters, a natural depiction would mean to me an accurate representation of a part in a hybrid (a dog head and body in the case of Cerberus).

⁷ I would like to express here my personal thanks to Markus Janka from the University of Munich for bringing this term in this context to my attention.

The abnormality will slowly creep onto a reader who, unknowingly, will gradually shift from being immersed in a familiar world to a (sometimes abrupt) realization that he or she has been introduced to an altogether alien world.

Employing the opposite tactics, the author may start their narration from a hugely defamiliarized level, encrusting the text with strange images or enigmatic neologisms and then, step by step, uncovering mysteries, unlocking connections, or explaining new words. In the course of a reading, what was at first unfamiliar becomes tamed and domesticated and the reader starts to feel at home.

This is exactly what I observed in the children's books studied here: that authors and even more illustrators employed the second approach of taking on a well-known and atrocious being and making it more pleasant, familiar, or even cosy. There is nothing here to be afraid of. Their approach is not unlike the one used by parents who demask the darkness under child's bed: look, there's nothing there, the space is devoid of any monsters and the strange shadows were simply a toy that had been accidentally set in an odd position.

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ELIZABETH HALE

Facing the Minotaur in the Australian Labyrinth: Politics and the Personal in *Requiem for a Beast*

'I been watchin' you, mate,' Pete continues,
'and I can see that you been hurtin'.
You got somethin' big locked up inside you there.
We've all got our stories, eh?'
Matt Ottley, *Requiem for a Beast*

Requiem for a Beast: A Work for Image, Word and Music by Matt Ottley (2007)¹ is an Australian mixed-media text for young adults that intertwines the myth of Theseus with the story of a boy's coming of age in the Australian Outback. Told through paintings, fragments of graphic novel, diary entry, spoken memories, dreams, and song cycle, it takes young readers into a series of physical, emotional, and historical labyrinths. Physically, the labyrinths appear in the Australian landscape, a place of sweeping beauty but also hot, bare, and threatening (to non-Indigenous people). Emotionally, the labyrinths appear in the boy's backstory: a troubled childhood and a broken relationship with his father. They also appear in the complex history of Australian colonization and the damage done to the Indigenous peoples of the country by colonial settlers and governments. As the boy goes into those labyrinths, he becomes a modern Theseus. He encounters a Minotaur formed by generations of trauma: the trauma visited on the Australian Aborigines and the generational guilt of settlers' descendants. The boy (who as an everyman figure remains unnamed in the book) must face the Minotaur and conquer it in order to begin the process of healing the wounds of the past: his own, his father's, and those of the Aboriginal figures in the book – an elderly Bundjalung woman who was stolen from her parents as a child (through a system of institutionalized racism) and an Aboriginal teenager who was killed in a moment of casual cruelty by a friend of the boy's father. The connected stories of different generations of White and Black Australians interweave with the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur to form a politically charged and deeply felt work, showing the power of young adult fiction to take on difficult subjects and to help young readers negotiate labyrinths of their own.

¹ All quotations are from this edition.

In this chapter, I will trace the boy's journey into physical, emotional, and historical labyrinths. As I do so, I will explore how Ottley interweaves an imported myth (the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur) into a uniquely Australian context, showing how the personal and political are closely connected in a land and people that have been scarred, but also constructed, by colonization. *Requiem for a Beast* attempts something unusual, but also important, in children's literature: the author uses universal myths to enhance cultural understanding and shows how facing a mythical beast from the classical tradition enables a modern Australian boy to take steps towards overcoming the real beasts of personal and national history.

Structure

Requiem for a Beast tells its interconnected stories through layers of word, image, song, and music, in which memories, present action, and mythic action interweave. To summarize: the boy has left the city for a small Northern town, to take work as a trainee stockman or jackaroo,² rounding up cattle for the annual muster. He is escaping a troubled past, in which he has suffered from depression, cheated in his exams, and attempted suicide. These troubles begin when he discovers that his much-admired father was racked by guilt for his (as a young man) complicity – in the sense of failure to prevent – in the murder of an Aboriginal boy. The protagonist's subsequent feelings of shame, betrayal, and alienation are symbolized in the image of the Minotaur, a monstrous figure that he encountered on a visit to a museum at around the same time. In the same way that sufferers from depression feel haunted by their illness, the boy feels powerless in the face of the Minotaur which he feels "hunts" and "tracks" him (63).

To recover a sense of self, the boy goes to the country to work as a stockman, mustering cattle in the same region where his father had grown up. During a gathering storm he encounters a powerful Brahman bull, which has evaded capture for many years. Following the bull into the wild country, and entranced by the heat of the day, he slips into a space of dreams and visions in which his memories of his own past, his father's past, and the country's past, float through the present. As he attempts to capture the bull, he catches it by the tail, and pulls it into a ravine, where it is fatally injured. To save the bull from an agonisingly slow death, the boy takes his knife and kills the bull, saying as he does it: "I'm sorry I have to do this to you. Please forgive me" (76). As the rain begins to fall, the boy is bathed in the bull's blood and feels a cathartic purification. He realizes he must find the Aboriginal youth's mother (who has appeared in his visions) and tell her what happened to her son. It will be difficult and will get his father into trouble, but it is part of a reparation that needs to happen. Being ready to tell

² Australian slang for a trainee agricultural worker, akin to a cowboy or stockman. The feminine is 'jillaroo'.

his story is a sign that he has recovered a sense of himself; he has come of age, both as a young man and as a young Australian.

Weaving through the boy's story is the story of another Aboriginal woman, an elder whom the boy has overheard on his first day in the town as he passes a community hall. Speaking to an audience in the hall, she talks about what happened to her in her childhood, when the government took her and her sister away from their families, to Missions where they were raised and educated according to Christian principles, before being put into service (42–45).³ Her sister, who “made trouble”, was stripped naked and beaten: “They tried to belt the memory out of her. Years later she tried to do the same to herself, only with alcohol. [...] she never made it to the morning” (43).

Unlike her sister the woman survived. She eventually found her way back home, but it was too late: she had been separated from her family, her mother, and her mother's knowledge, during the crucial years of her adolescence. “It was as if ‘family’ was an alien idea to those of us who'd been taken” (43). “It's our memories that make us”, she says (a phrase that refers to the boy as much as to herself). “This country, these hills you see, this is my mother's country, and her mother's too. I'm supposed to be a fully initiated woman, but that knowledge, that memory, is gone” (2–7). These words appear in several places in the text (see, e.g., 42) and are foregrounded in the opening of *Requiem*, floating through a sequence of full-page landscapes, shifting from twilight to sunset, to night, and the light of a full moon (2–7).

The old woman's words begin a process of untangling a welter of emotions that have been holding the boy hostage. Her words and her image flow through his mind as he faces the bull, offering him a way out of the labyrinths of emotion, trauma, and bad history that have trapped him. She functions as an Ariadne figure whose voice and words lead the boy to the actions that will enable him to come of age and to make reparation – to begin healing some of the wounds of the past and, in the process, to heal himself, in a narrative that draws both on the classical myth of the Minotaur and the myths of Australia's past and present.

Presentation and Reception

The stories at the centre of *Requiem for a Beast* are relatively simple. The storytelling, however, is not. It is presented in four parts named from the Latin

³ Missions, which were in action from approximately 1910 to 1970, were organized by the church and state to Christianize and educate Indigenous peoples, training them for work (often on farms and stations). Some missions provided a place of refuge from violent farmers (known as pastoralists), but for most Aborigines, they were places that disrupted their heritage, and many people, often children, were forced there, “stolen” by the state. The abuses that took place in Missions were considerable.

Requiem Mass: *Dies Irae*; *Mors Stupebit et Natura*; *Lacrymosa*; and *Pie Jesu* (each title is a line from the hymn *Dies Irae*). It is accompanied by a CD on which is recorded a Requiem, composed by Ottley, sung in Latin and in Bundjalung – the language of the Bundjalung Nation, members of which Ottley consulted in the writing of the text.⁴ The story is presented in a handsome hard-back picture-book format, with glossy pages. Some pages are full- or double-page spreads, of large oil and acrylic paintings, which Ottley painted over the years of the work's generation.⁵ On some of them, printed words appear as snatches of speech, memory, and narrative. No part is told in exactly the same way. Many parts of the boy's and the woman's memories are told in graphic novel format, with images drawn in pen and ink, and with written narrative and dialogue, sometimes as part of the boy's diary, sometimes as part of the woman's memories. Other parts are told as blocks of printed text. Sometimes the narrative fragments; other times it winds back on itself. Occasionally other documents appear, such as images of old photographs or explanatory texts from museum exhibits providing explication and context. This is serious postmodern storytelling, which asks readers to work among visual and verbal narratives to piece together a collage of information, in a reading that is intended to be slow, concentrated, immersive, and intense – a serious reflection on a difficult subject.

Ottley, who wrote, illustrated, and composed *Requiem for a Beast*, designed it as a work encouraging contemplation and engagement in a topic of significant cultural interest in Australia. Ottley was born in Papua New Guinea in 1964 and emigrated to Australia with his parents in 1973. After leaving high school early, he worked for some years as a stockman in Queensland, before going to Sydney to study Fine Arts. Since then, he has been a self-employed artist, composer, illustrator, and writer.⁶ He began the work for *Requiem* in 1995, as a sixteen-minute musical composition called *Allegory of the Bull*, “for string quartet and harpsichord, and was to have had twelve large accompanying canvases, of which only one painting was ever completed” (Ottley 2008, 22). He began to revise the idea in 2002 and the work was published as *Requiem for a Beast* in 2007.

⁴ The Bundjalung nation inhabits the northern coast of New South Wales.

⁵ Indeed, I read *Requiem for a Beast* as a visual homage to Australia, even while it is a work of social criticism. The illustrations and artwork allude to the work of prominent Australian artists, such as Arthur Boyd (1920–1999) and Sidney Nolan (1917–1992), both of whom dedicated much of their careers to exploring myths, both Australian and European, in the Australian landscape, works both of social criticism and celebration of a distinctive land. Other allusions float through *Requiem*, such as that to Banjo Patterson's poem “The Man from Snowy River” (1890), about a quest to recapture the escaped colt of a prize-winning racehorse that has found its way to join the wild brumbies in the Snowy Mountains on the border of New South Wales and Victoria. Integrating a Theseus and the Minotaur myth, then, fits neatly into a tradition of literature and art that explores the contest between man and nature.

⁶ See the autobiographical information on his official site (Ottley [n.d.]).

In the intervening years, a major part of Australian political life involved public discussion of the treatment of the Aborigines, in particular the state-sanctioned disruption of generations of Aboriginal families known as the Stolen Generations, which took place from 1910 into the 1970s. As part of a misguided attempt to force assimilation, half-caste children were removed from their families and communities, to be educated by the state or adopted out into white families, where they were encouraged to reject their Aboriginal culture. Abuse was common. In 1997, a major report, *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, revealed the scale of the situation. In 1999, then Prime Minister John Howard moved a “motion of reconciliation”, and expressed the nation’s “regret”, but did not issue a formal apology.⁷ In 2008, not long after the publication of *Requiem for a Beast*, the new Prime Minister Kevin Rudd gave a long-anticipated “Sorry Speech”, a formal acknowledgement of the mistreatment of Indigenous people. During the intervening years, national opinion was divided, between those who called for an apology and those who viewed it as an excessive revisioning of Australian history that undermined a sense of colonial achievement and failed to acknowledge changing mores. *Requiem for a Beast* was written during these years of debate, which were known in some circles as the “history wars”, in which the two positions were broadly characterized as “black armband” (i.e. excessively apologetic) and “white blindfold” (i.e. blinkered by racial politics). *Requiem* falls into the “black armband” camp: it makes a strong case for the need both for an apology, and for reparation (Macintyre and Clark 2004). Indeed, it requires acknowledgement that the Australian history is one of damage, of hidden violence, and it makes the case that reparation is important not only for the Aborigines who suffered the trauma, but also to resolve the bad faith and alienation inherited by modern Australians.

Requiem for a Beast found an appreciative audience, especially in Australian literary and education circles. The Children’s Book Council of Australia (CBCA) awarded it the title of Picture Book of the Year in 2008, and it has since been included on the Australian national school curriculum, where it sits in a number of study themes such as “journey”, “belonging”, and “postmodern”.⁸ Its focus on a young Australian’s story, its emphasis on coming-of-age, on family matters, on

⁷ In 2007 John Howard explained his resistance: “I have never been willing to embrace a formal national apology, because I do not believe the current generation can accept responsibility for the deeds of earlier generations. And there’s always been a fundamental unwillingness to accept, in this debate, the difference between an expression of sorrow and an assumption of responsibility”. Read the interview in the Internet on the Australian Government website (Howard 2007).

⁸ See for example, Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards, New South Wales (2014). *Requiem for a Beast* regularly appears in classroom sets for study in relation to the Higher School Certificate and to these themes.

youth issues such as depression and suicide, and its political elements, all make it a rich text for the classroom, repaying careful study and inviting a number of interpretations.⁹ Its reception has not been without controversy, however. Some critics and educators questioned the CBCA award, because of the “foul” language of the story (rather than the story itself), likely assuming that picture books must be directed at young children. This of course reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of the target audiences, and reach, of picture books, which are not only written for very young children, as Ottley himself has observed (Sorenson 2008). Indeed, there are many political picture books in Australia, dealing with dark and difficult subjects. “Foul” language in the text reflects its confronting subject matter and the emotional depths of the boy’s confrontation with shame, guilt, past and present trauma. It is an expression of Ottley’s willingness to go into dark territories, to cross lines, and to breach taboos. It is possible that those who objected to the book’s language unconsciously objected to the pain in the book: its clarity about the problems in families and Australian society.

It is possible, too, that some critics may have found objections eased by Ottley’s use of the Minotaur myth – a story from the foundations of society, a canonical move that casts the Stolen Generations and other “black armband” debates in a palatable light. Erica Hateley suspects that the use of canonical material was partly responsible for the book’s glowing reception by critics and awarding bodies (2012, 189–199). Canonical credentials notwithstanding, the myth of the Minotaur offers a way to think about shame, trauma, repression, and the fighting of personal or political demons, and is imported into the Australian context to powerful effect. Certainly a large part of the book’s effectiveness comes from the juxtaposition of the classical myth with the iconography of Australian masculinity, in which boy and beast are also cast as jackaroo and Brahman bull, and working within an established Australian tradition of stories of loss and lostness.¹⁰ Here we have an Australian text with a political intention, told for young readers, and couched in the terms of a young Australian man’s coming of age. Its use of standard imagery of the Australian national narrative (stockman, horse, bull, landscape, settlement, natives, soldiers, bushrangers),

⁹ Its postmodern layering is considered “difficult” by some, such as the education scholar Trevor Cairney (2008), who commented in his review of the book that “this text requires effort” and considerable guidance for students.

¹⁰ As Peter Pierce (1999) points out, Australian literature is full of stories of lost European children, who are taken by a land that is hostile, challenging, foreign, replete with signs that white settlers are unable to read. From Ethel Pedley’s *Dot and the Kangaroo* (1899) to Joan Lindsay’s *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1967), the fear of the Australian landscape as a kind of large outdoor labyrinth, makes for a literary sense of the country as a trap for the unwary. Hateley is astute in identifying *Requiem*’s participation in that tradition. The boy in *Requiem*, however, is lost more in the labyrinth of history (personal and national) than in the land itself.

combined with its use of the iconic Minotaur myth, make it a narrative of forces of history and of the land and the people who live there. That juxtaposition serves both to familiarize and to defamiliarize the land and its stories. On the one hand, we have the Australian bush narrative of man vs. environment; on the other, we have the classical myth which comes from a long way overseas. On the one hand, we have a confronting historical and personal narrative of loss, fear, and trauma; on the other, we have a classical myth which encapsulates its trauma in a recognizable and universal story. The Minotaur myth both makes the story easier to digest, being a familiar story whose parts we already know; we also know it will take us into the dark aspects of our human psychodrama; our struggles with our darker selves. It is a story that makes the strange familiar, and also makes the familiar strange, in terms of the boy's family history and the nation.

Entering the Labyrinth

Ottley's Minotaur myth takes the boy of *Requiem* into many confronting areas, both personal and national. To begin with the personal: the boy's anger with his father, his discovery of his father's weakness, and his own struggles with depression and suicide, are all rolled together in his identification with the Minotaur myth. Casting them as the Minotaur shows how depression lurks at the centre of a maze of human emotions and also looms over the sufferer, to the point where the boy is both afraid of the Minotaur and afraid that he has "become such a beast" himself (23). A full-page painting shows the boy transforming into a beast, screaming with pain, clutching his head. It is an expression of the boy's fears that he is becoming something monstrous. Such images suggest that this boy's adolescence involves a monstrous metamorphosis, in which the teenager is a troublesome hybrid, both innocent child and knowing adult, unable to reconcile his parts. Overcoming the Minotaur, then, means figuratively and literally conquering his own troublesome self, a self that has become troublesome because of the demons of his relationship with his father. To put it another way, Ottley suggests that the boy is both Theseus and Minotaur; himself and his emotions a tangled labyrinth that he needs to find his way through.

In Part 3, *Lacrymosa*, the boy discovers the scope of that labyrinth, that it is more than merely personal. In this part, the boy is on the land in his role as stockman: he has followed the bull into a small natural amphitheatre. He believes it is about to charge, and he prepares himself, but the bull runs out of the amphitheatre and into the land. The boy follows, nerving himself to leap off his horse to catch the bull by the tail and unbalance it, but is unable to. He simply "follows the bull slowly through the glaring heat, deeper into the day, and deeper into himself" (50). This is of course the beginnings of a shamanistic purification ritual, a spiritual *katabasis*, in which the boy enters the maze of his memories, of dreams and bad events from the past, in which the Minotaur and the Centaur

feature.¹¹ He remembers going to the museum with his father, where for the first time he saw images of both creatures and where the Minotaur began the stalking that has taken him to this point, an originating moment he begins to reflect on:

What was it that happened that day? Why did that strange beast follow me – out of the museum and into the rest of my life? It hunted me, tracked me through the years, and slowly drew my spirit – who I was – from me until there was nothing left. And then four years ago almost took me. But often through the years, as the beast pursued me, it seemed like something else; something that chased me to the edge of fear, but was beautiful, powerful, desirable but unreachable. (63)

This journey is explicitly connected to his father, and he begins to remember what he has probably repressed (it is not made clear): that his father, who had seemed all-powerful to him, was weak where it had counted most, in his complicity in the murder of the Aboriginal boy, a memory that is brought back by his own fear of taking down the Brahman bull. In one way this is a simple Oedipal coming of age, in which a boy seeks to challenge and overcome his flawed, but still powerful, father, by his prowess in facing the beast. Resenting the father, who would, in the boy's words, "have already thrown the bastard and made a story out of it" (64), the boy suddenly "whispers, enshrouded in shame, 'Surely you were afraid sometimes? Weren't you? Afraid like I am?'" (64). Answering these questions is his sudden memory of overhearing his father confess what he did, or rather did not do, when as a young man he had not stopped a friend from murdering an Aboriginal youth by throwing him off a bridge:

None of us did anything. Nothing. Jesus, love, I've never been able to get away from the sound that came out of that boy's mouth as he went over the edge. [...] I kept telling myself that the kid was all right, that he had swum ashore that night and scarpered. After a while I did manage to – I don't know – bury it in me somewhere, so I wouldn't have to think about it any more. Somehow I managed over the years to forget about it. (65–66)

As the memory of his father's past confession rings in his ears, in the present the boy begins to wrestle the Brahman bull, grabbing its tail, pulling it towards the edge of a nearby ravine. Is he re-enacting the fall of the Aboriginal boy? Or his father's actions in burying his memories of complicity? Competing with his father's prowess as a young jackaroo? Of course, he is doing all these things. But there is more, and Ottley moves the narrative on to a wider frame of reference, to a national story.

If Ottley had restricted the story only to the boy and his father, *Requiem* would remain individual and personal; a story of personal depression, caused by

¹¹ I follow Ottley in his *Study Notes* (2008) and capitalize Minotaur and Centaur to underscore their powerful, mythic singularity in *Requiem for a Beast*.

alienation from a flawed but authoritarian father, and limited to a common coming-of-age narrative about identity and depression. His encounter with the bull could be framed as part of a commonplace engagement with masculinity: a classic fight with a beast, in which the boy enters adulthood. But Ottley does not leave it there. The boy's personal narrative begins to blur and fragment further, interspersed with memories from the old woman's story, which is a story of the Stolen Generations, and thus a national story.

Ottley uses the Minotaur to symbolize the national psychodrama as well: the "wider colonial histories of violence and narrative which comprise contemporary Australia" (Hateley 2015, 82); the country's racism which is both systemic and casual. The Minotaur symbolizes the shame of this history and the pain its lack of resolution continues to inflict on the Aborigines, and also on the inheritors of this system. As Ottley indicates in his *Study Notes* (2008), he sees the figures of the Minotaur and Centaur symbolizing settlers' warped vision of the Aborigines; one that enabled them to justify the systematic oppression and destruction of Aboriginal communities, to tear the people from their land and their culture, to destroy their knowledge of their own heritage and land.

This is clearest in the two-page spread in which the boy dreams about Rudy, an Aboriginal stockman who merges with an out-of-control horse he is riding to become an unrecognizable creature. As he becomes a monstrous Centaur, Rudy cries out, trying to retain his own identity, in words that recall the abductions of generations of Aboriginal children:

'No,' he cried. 'Please don't take me away.' The fear in his voice was absolute, shocking. I felt my eyes well with tears and I could only watch in horror as the horse twisted and writhed, galloping in huge circles. Rudy's voice became louder until it was deafening, a hideous screaming, the words no longer discernable. (52–53)

In his *Study Notes*, Ottley makes the following suggestion:

From the allegorical perspective, this spread is of central importance to the book. The metaphor of the beast as representing Indigenous culture as the European invaders saw it becomes clear as Rudy – the Aboriginal stockman – morphs into the beast. He becomes a combination of the Minotaur and the Centaur. In Greek mythology the Minotaur was a creature to be feared and loathed without reservation. The Centaur, however, had a mixed reaction among the ancient Greeks. It was thought of, and respected as, a noble warrior, but also feared for its violence and drunkenness. These are all qualities historically assigned to the Indigenous people of Australia. The graphic sequence in this spread is also multi-

-layered. Rudy cries out, 'please don't take me away', a direct reference to the issue of the Stolen Generations. (2008, 13)¹²

Ottley, here, is analyzing his work for high-school students, directing them to the self-identified thematic purpose of his work. Through showing Rudy transformed into a monstrous, screaming Centaur, he emphasizes the warping effect of colonization on Indigenous people. Though Ottley does not say this directly, he may also be implying that Rudy, by doing the work of colonizers – riding a horse, rounding up cattle – becomes a painful hybrid of master and slave, of human and of animal. (Elsewhere, he points out that colonizers treated the Aborigines as bestial.) But it is not only the Aborigines who are warped into hybrid beasts, becoming Minotaurs or Centaurs, as an early passage in *Requiem* points out. As the old Aboriginal woman tells her story in the community hall, behind her an old man begins to sing:

He said the song was about the first time his ancestors saw a white man. That day, he said, was his people's day of reckoning, when the world changed for them. They saw a man on a horse, a *two headed ghost*. 'Be careful,' the words in the song said, 'the ghost will come to take you away.' (21)

In this clear image, pastoralists or government officers on horseback become ominous Centaurs, monstrous figures which foreshadow the mythical beasts the boy is contending with. Alongside this song is layered another story, "about kin and connection. There was one about a little girl who dies and her grandfather follows her into the spirit world to make sure she is in the right place" (21). This song emphasizes the power of family and of generational responsibility. Small wonder that the boy, representative of a modern Australia whose citizens have inherited the results of their forebears' actions, becomes the repository of this warping effect, the inheritor of generations of shame. Here, I think we see a direct response to Prime Minister Howard's refusal to take responsibility for the mistakes of previous generations: the boy is suffering *because* of the actions of the past, which have come down to him un-redressed.¹³ Tracing his way into the outback, into a personal labyrinth that becomes a political minefield, the boy discovers that he is facing a much larger, older, more entrenched Minotaur, symbolic of a shame that hangs over, or lies beneath, Australian culture as a whole.

¹² Inclusion as a text on the Australian school curriculum is another endorsement of *Requiem's* perceived quality. It is also comparatively lucrative for children's writers, who produce in a marketplace marked by ephemerality and fashion. Many writers and publishers provide study guides for students, which either sit on publishers' websites as additional material or which writers can provide at a fee through their own sites.

¹³ And of course a further layer is the Christian idea of generational redemption. The boy is being punished for the sins of his father (see, e.g., Exodus 20:5), and through his actions is able to take steps to redeem both generations.

This partly explains the way that the Minotaur figure appears in the boy's youthful landscape (63), in windows, in mirrors, in the hills, in the sky.

A great deal of contemporary young adult fiction about the Minotaur is sympathetic to the figure. After all, the Minotaur did not ask to be monstrous, is the offspring of some generations of mistakes and bad behaviour. Contemporary Australian novels for young readers emphasize the value of empathy, especially for overcoming the fear of the Other, and in the service of that endeavour recuperate the Minotaur.¹⁴ Ottley's Minotaur seems to be more complicated than that, both a figure requiring empathy and one that is terrifying and needing to be destroyed.

How does one face a Minotaur like this? How does one even know if it exists, if one is from the culture that has brought such destruction to a country, if one is benefiting from that culture? Ottley's boy does so by going into the heart of the labyrinth, going into the land, meeting Aboriginal people, and listening to them. That he does so accidentally at first is significant, for he does not go to the land out of a desire to learn about the Aborigines. He goes to find himself, and to prove himself. His encounter with the old Aboriginal woman is accidental: only by hearing her voice as it floats out towards him from the hall, is he given the thread to conquer the labyrinth. But it is only by accepting the multiple meanings of his journey, by placing his father's actions and his own demons in a wider context, that the boy is able to make the journey to fight the beast. In doing so, he gains the courage necessary to begin the process of reparation.

For a modern Theseus to kill the Minotaur, and to repair the damage, takes a particular kind of courage, which exceeds a normal, straightforward, hero's journey, facing as it does the aftermath of colonization. Hateley suggests that "normative linking of gender, race, and national identity within a hegemonic matrix of 'heroism' are untenable in the postcolonial context of contemporary Australia". She sees the boy "self-reflexively" using the Theseus myth "in an attempt to reconcile his own location as anti-hero, as representative of the enemy empire, as inheritor and beneficiary of ongoing violence against Indigenous Australia, and as agent" (2011, 5). While I think the boy is rather possessed by the Theseus myth, in the form of the Minotaur of inherited bad feelings and bad faith, the point holds: whether the boy uses the myth, or is taken over by the myth, the

¹⁴ See for instance Jennifer Cook's feminist retelling of the Theseus myth, *Ariadne: The Maiden and the Minotaur* (2004), in which the Minotaur is a disabled boy called Taurus, the offspring of an affair between Pasiphaë and a priest of Poseidon. In this telling, the Labyrinth is a monstrous trap for outsiders, but functions also as a protection for Taurus, who is the symbol of his father's cuckoldry. In Myke Bartlett's *Fire in the Sea* (2012), the Minotaur is a terrifying beast, but one that is in the service of a powerful priestess of Atlantis, who uses it to terrorize others. When the heroine, Sadie, looks into its eyes, she sees a flicker of humanity there, and she liberates it from servitude.

result is the same: he is purified, comes of age, and is able to move forward, to take actions which will lead to reparation.

As the boy explains to Pete, an older stockman, who comes to find him in the darkness after he has killed the bull, he must find the mother of the murdered Aboriginal boy and tell her what happened to her son:

‘I think I have an answer for them. Thing is, if I do find them and talk about it, it’s going to open up a big can of worms. Cause lots of pain. I might...’ the boy’s words falter into the darkness and the rhythm of the plodding horses – ‘even be putting my old man and some of his mates into trouble. Serious trouble.’ (78)

It is at this point that the boy explicitly identifies he cannot do this reparation alone. He needs the help of the right person to talk to; in this case the woman elder whose words – “it’s our memories that make us” – have begun the boy’s process of unravelling the past:

‘So why the old lady?’ Pete eventually says.

The boy has fallen in behind Pete and in the privacy of the darkness he smiles, knowing that the man has framed that question because he does understand, can see a thread running through the boy’s ramblings. A sense of relief unfurls through his body. ‘I suppose it’s because she’s an elder. She’d be the right person to talk to first.’

‘I been watchin’ you, mate,’ Pete continues, ‘and I can see that you been hurtin’. You got somethin’ big locked up inside you there. We’ve all got our stories, eh?’ (79)

Here the written narrative makes clear what has already been implicit in the visual story. The old lady has operated as an Ariadne figure, offering through her story a thread that leads the boy in and out of the labyrinth of memory, history, and emotion, towards the first steps of a possible reconciliation and reparation. Throughout the *Lacrymosa* section, she appears again and again, as an image of a little girl in a pale blue dress. Sometimes she is riding the bull. Sometimes she is standing with the Minotaur. Sometimes she is holding a rope (alluding to the boy’s lasso, to the ropes that sometimes are used to restrain livestock, and of course to the original Ariadne’s thread). There are some significant differences, however. The original Ariadne gave Theseus the key to the Labyrinth in betrayal of her father, because she knew that its torments needed to be ended. She was also, if the myth is to be believed, in love with Theseus, and seeking perhaps a way to escape her father’s palace. In *Requiem*, this Aboriginal Ariadne does not know the boy; does not seek him out; does not know his journey. She appears in his visions, as he faces the bull. And when he has completed his ritual, he knows that he must go and speak to her; that she will help him find the thread of

connection to the family of the boy his father's friend killed, and that she will help him put things right; that she will help him heal one part of the community:

Pete, the older stockman, agrees that she will have the wisdom to help:

'I reckon if you want to talk to them people, go to that elder. Tell her your story – I mean your own story. Aboriginal families are all pretty well connected. I reckon she'll know where you can find that family. Or where to start, anyway. And when you find them they'll let you know what it is you gotta say about their story.' (79)

Conclusions, or the Journey Begins

Requiem for a Beast makes an earnest attempt to show that White Australia has much to learn from the Indigenous peoples of the land. The boy's journey into the land, and into the heat of the day, has much in common with Indigenous initiation rituals, which test endurance and strength and transition boys into men. But more than that, the incorporation of Aboriginal perspectives into this Theseus myth valuably complicates a potentially Eurocentric story. To put it another way, the Aboriginal stories are a powerful part of *Requiem*. Ottley does not push the Aboriginal people to the edges in this story, in the way that Ambellin Kwaymullina (of the Palyku nation, in the Pilbara region of Western Australia) notes:

Aboriginal people share a long experience of being forced to the edges with Indigenous peoples elsewhere on this planet. The edges of society, of history, and even of the consensus of reality. The centre ground of "truth" is claimed by Eurocentric knowledge traditions, while ancient Indigenous understandings are labelled myth and legend, the stuff of metaphor rather than metaphysics. The diverse cultures of our many nations are subsumed into homogenous labels like "Aboriginal", and the richness and complexity of our existence lost to racist stereotypes of ignorant savages. (2014, 22–23)

The question must nevertheless be asked: why does an imported myth help this boy work out his problems, and make the move to reconciliation? And given that images of importation, invasion, settlement, and conquering pervade the narrative, one might ask: has the Minotaur myth conquered the myths of the Indigenous people? One or two Indigenous myths appear in *Requiem*. As the old woman bears witness to her lost childhood, behind her, an old man sings a song about an old man who goes into the Underworld to make sure his dead granddaughter finds her proper place; this song is also sung, in the language of the Bundjalung nation, in the CD of the Latin Requiem that accompanies the book:

Dundigan baygal
Jundi beh ngurahm

This old man-grandfather
Went to sleep,

<i>Jan-ga wana babarah</i>	Then he went up above.
<i>Mala babarah maadja</i>	
<i>Banahm</i>	Brother
<i>Babarah-wana-eh</i>	Went above.
<i>Ngaw wa-nula</i>	That place for her (now).
<i>Ngangana.</i> (88)	

As I have worked on this chapter and thought about this book, I have wondered if using classical myth might be part of a narrative blind-spot; after all *Requiem for a Beast* focuses on the developing subjectivity of a young white man of European descent, the seemingly neutral subject of so many stories. His guilt, his shame, his remorse, his demons, his battle, *his Minotaur*, seem to be at the story's centre. And yet the boy, this modern Theseus, does not abandon Ariadne after he conquers the Minotaur. Instead, he seeks her out (perhaps moving towards becoming Dionysus?), in order to begin another journey, one that does not push her to the side, one which recognizes the value of Aboriginal knowledge and recognizes that his own journey is simply one of many journeys. As Pete says, "we've all got our stories, eh?" (79).

Indeed, we do. And part of *Requiem's* force is that it includes so many stories, and does so respectfully. A significant theme of the work is the power of storytelling, and the power of voice. Facing, and conquering, the Minotaur of repressed and silenced stories enables the truth to be released. *Requiem for a Beast* uses postmodern techniques of fragmentation, juxtaposition, and compression to hint at the multitudes of interconnected stories. And while I have so far emphasized stories of pain, trauma, repression, and silencing, I want now to suggest that another view is also possible: that the boy's journey takes us to a view of complexity and richness, with damage as part of that richness, and moves us towards one of hope, and inclusivity. By the end of *Requiem* the boy is no longer lost. He knows what his story is, and he knows how to begin to tell it. He has found his way through the Australian labyrinth.

We might leave it there. But one final issue lingers, at least in my mind. The boy has defeated his Minotaur; is making steps towards reparation and reconciliation, and of course this is a satisfactory conclusion (or beginning). But what of the bull? The bull is not a Minotaur. It is a Brahman bull; it and its fellow Brahman cattle have grazed in Australia for many generations. Brahman cattle were first brought to Australia from India in the 1930s, as able to cope with a hot climate. They have large fatty humps on their shoulders, which store water (in the same way that a camel's hump does). They are imported creatures, like the boy, and like the myth of the Minotaur. Perhaps this is the greatest irony of this story: that the boy and the bull enact an imported myth in a land to which neither really "belongs".

The bull is a magnificent and brave beast, living in an outback that is seemingly wild, but that has been colonized for generations and farmed since the early days of settlement. The animal has escaped muster over many years and is

spoken of with awe in the nearby town. In its death it teaches the boy something valuable. And in this story, we find the bull giving up its life, narratively speaking, as part of the story of the boy's reaching understanding. Perhaps this is why the boy apologizes so movingly to the bull: "I'm sorry I have to do this to you. Please forgive me" (76).

A hero may have to kill. But he should never kill viciously, unthinkingly. The boy's journey has damaged the bull; to become a man he has to kill it consciously, and with honour. Ottley does not seem to be in any doubt that the Minotaur is monstrous and must be killed. But behind the Minotaur lie both boy and bull. How ironic, and how tragic, that in walking his path back to humanity, in killing his inner Minotaur, the boy has to kill an innocent, magnificent beast. And so, although *Requiem for a Beast* never explicitly mentions the great slaughtering and exploitation of animals that is also a part of Australian colonial history, implicitly the whole book acknowledges it. The bull appears on the cover, watching over the little Aboriginal girl in her pale blue dress. It appears on the last full page of the book (89), gazing at the reader, through a dusty, reddened light. Is it a ghost or spirit? Are we looking at its past or its future? As it looks at us, do we look back, into its eyes, and see in them our own memories? Do we find stories within us that could lead to our own reparations? If we do any of these things, the book has done its job: has functioned not only as a story of a boy's coming of age, but as a requiem, a laying to rest, an honouring, of the beast whose sacrifice has made it possible.¹⁵

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¹⁵ My thanks to Katarzyna Marciniak and her team at the Faculty of "Artes Liberales" UW for their kind invitation to be part of this project, and to the expert eyes and comments of Susan Deacy, John K. Hale, Hanna Paulouskaya, and Sarah Fiona Winters. Chasing the Mythical Beasts in children's literature has proven to be the most fascinating kind of scholarly endeavour, and to do so in such company is a rare and complete privilege.

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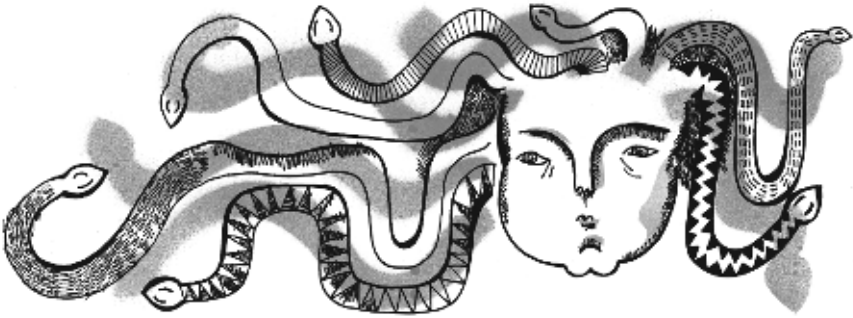
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PART 2

EYE TO EYE WITH MEDUSA & CO.: FACING THE FEMALE MONSTERS



Maja Abgarowicz, *Medusa* (2012).
Illustration created at the Workshop of Prof. Zygmunt Januszewski,
Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw.

SUSAN DEACY

“From the shadows”: Goddess, Monster, and Girl Power
in Richard Woff’s *Bright-Eyed Athena*
in the *Stories of Ancient Greece*

“Monsters are our children.”
Jeffrey Jerome Cohen

Introducing the Shadows

An exploration of the Gorgon is especially appealing for a volume that is chasing mythical beasts.¹ Of all the monsters of classical myth, it is this one that can reveal particularly acutely the preoccupations and fears of the culture that is representing the monster, whether an ancient culture or any subsequent one.² The current volume is investigating “how the reception of creatures and monsters from Graeco-Roman mythology reflects the changes in human sensitivity, morality, and attitude to the concept of the monstrosity itself”.³ Any creature can do

¹ I would like to thank Katarzyna Marciniak for the opportunity to present the initial ideas that have grown into the current chapter in the company of other academics exploring Mythical Beasts in Warsaw in May 2016. For their comments on a penultimate version of this paper, I am thankful to Elizabeth Hale, Hanna Paulouskaya, and Trevor Dean. The transition from conference paper to chapter has been both smoother and more pleasurable thanks to a very welcome correspondence with Richard Woff, the author of the book under discussion here.

² According to Paul Murgatroyd, monsters “probe some of the darkest, deepest and most ancient fears of the human race” (2013, 1). On what monsters reveal about the cultures that represent them, see Cohen (1996) and Lowe (2015).

³ See the conference booklet of the *Chasing Mythical Beasts...* project (Marciniak and Olechowska 2016, 5). On the challenges of defining monsters and monstrosity, cf. Morgan (PhD dissertation, 1984) and Williams (1999). Daniel Ogden explores the challenges around defining serpent-based monsters (2013a and 2013b). Cohen’s proposal to avoid a monster taxonomy (1996) is echoed in Ismene Lada-Richards’ exploration of the boundaries of monster-terrain in Antiquity (2002, esp. 43–49). Dunstan Lowe reflects the current state of play in reading Monster Theory as “less a

this – and the Gorgon, with its acute hybridity and terror-inducing gaze, especially encapsulates the cultural values, ideals, and fears of those who are receiving it. Thus, the Gorgon provides a gateway to an understanding of the age that represents it. So, too, does Athena, the goddess with various associations with monsters and the monstrous and who likewise has the potential to define any receiving age (Deacy 2008, 141–156).

I am going to focus on a particular moment in the reception – for children – of the Gorgon and of Athena. The moment is *Bright-Eyed Athena in the Stories of Ancient Greece*, a book for children by Richard Woff as part of the British Museum Press’s “Looking at Myths and Legends” series. The book was published in 1999, at the time when its author was working in the Education Service at the British Museum as its Head of Schools and Young Audiences Education, leading the team that provided educational programmes and resources across the collection.⁴

The Gorgon does not figure in the title. *Bright-Eyed Athena* is centred, rather, on a goddess – and a goddess, at that, who might appear very different from the Gorgon. The Gorgon possesses a fiery gaze that turns the living into the dead, or into statues. Athena, in contrast, is the “bright-eyed” deity who, in the book, watches over her people, guiding them to become the best they can – and the goddess helps keep the world safe from monsters. Where there is room for the Gorgon, it would appear to be as the enemy of the goddess. Indeed, one of the stories narrated in *Bright-Eyed Athena* concerns how, prompted by Athena, Perseus goes off in quest of the head of the monster. Woff paints Athena and the Gorgon as polar opposites: the goddess against the monster. But, as I shall be discussing, the book also sets up a complex relationship between the mundane world and the world of the Beyond: the world of the Gorgon. Monstrosity is never far away, and this includes the monstrosity of Athena and the monstrosity of others, including the child Erichthonios, whose appearance “from the shadows” (Woff 1999, 47), has supplied the title of this chapter.

I shall start by introducing the monster and the goddess who slays – and yet who echoes – this monster. Then I shall introduce how Classical Antiquity – its monsters included – is depicted in Woff’s book. After that, I shall explore what it is that constitutes monstrosity in the book. Finally, I shall explore how the portrayal of monstrosity, goddess-monstrosity included, bears on another key feature of the book, the enculturation of girls.

coherent discipline than a clamour of voices competing to define what a monster is and how it should be interpreted” (2015, 28).

⁴ For details of the series that the book is part of, cf. below, page 181 of the main text and Woff (1999, book cover).

Introducing the Monster

Classical monsters continue to exert a hold today as they did for the ancients.⁵ One reason for this is just how different they seem to be from humans. They dwell far away. They have various traits of creatures from “our” world but often in curious combinations. There is the Sphinx for example: part lion, part bird, part human-like female. Or there is Cerberus, a dog, but a many-headed one. Or there are the Sirens, part human, part bird.⁶ Most of all there is the Gorgon, the most terrible of all creatures, with boars’ tusks and snakes for hair – a monster so terrible that its glance could leave the onlooker literally petrified.⁷ The Gorgon presents an image of monstrosity so horrible that is unendurable. It is the face of the Gorgon that instils terror in Odysseus while in the Underworld in the *Odyssey* (book 11) lest Persephone should call up the head of the “terrible prodigy” or even “monstrous monster” (δεινοῖο πελώρου, 11.634) the Gorgon. The possibility of such an encounter instils in him fear that is described via a particular colour term, χλωρόν (11.633). This term is often understood as ‘light green’, or perhaps likelier here ‘pale’ or ‘pallid’, although as used here it might point to another meaning of the term, in relation to growing plants (cf. Clarke 2004, 131–139, esp. 133–136). Thus, what Odysseus might be experiencing is a sprouting fear, one that is growing inside him.

Yet there is also another set of connotations of the Gorgon. As well as a terrible monster, it – or, better, she – is a vulnerable woman or goddess who, once, had a bad sexual encounter and as a consequence was turned from a lovely-haired maiden to a snaky-haired monster whose wail is the noise of a monster but also the agonized scream of a woman pregnant with children that are stuck within her body, until, with the scythe blow of Perseus, these children leap out of

⁵ On the role and appeal of monsters in Antiquity, cf., notably, Atherton (2002) and Lowe (2015). The ongoing, postclassical appeal of monsters is explored in Gloyd (2019). Paul Murgatroyd sums up the appeal of monsters before, during, after, and beyond the classical world: “Since earliest times monsters have awed, terrified and enthralled us” (2013, 1).

⁶ For a survey of ancient monsters, cf. Murgatroyd (2013). A particular category, snake-based monsters, is explored in Ogden (2013a and 2013b). A particular monster (Scylla) is explored in Hopman (2013). Classical monsters are explored in the context of those from a range of cultures in Cohen (1996, 6 and 12–13); Asma (2011); and Wengrow (2013).

⁷ On the Gorgon in Antiquity, cf., notably, Vernant (1991) and Ogden (2013b, 92–98). On the Gorgon in Antiquity and beyond, cf. Garber and Vickers (2003). Classical and postclassical representations of the beheading of the Gorgon are explored in Deacy, Hanesworth, Hawes, and Ogden (2016).

her severed neck.⁸ I shall explore how far Woff's depiction of the Gorgon is commensurate with both of these ancient conceptions of this monster.

Athena, meanwhile, is often understood as a figure that is far removed from anything akin to a monster. But, as I shall explore, Woff depicts a disconcerting and terror-inducing goddess. These are traits well-represented in ancient literature, not least in the γοργῶπις ('Gorgon-eyed' or 'Gorgon-faced') Athena of Euripides' *Helen* (1316) and *Electra* (1257).⁹ It is not that Woff is creating a new version of the goddess as one with a monster-side. Rather he is presenting a side of the ancient goddess often overlooked, in children's literature and elsewhere. I have said previously that "Athena is a slippery figure, who eludes straightforward characterisation" (Deacy 2008, 6). Part of this slipperiness includes a movement across and between the borders of deity and monster. I shall now start to explore how Woff constructs an Athena that can slip between god and monster.

Introducing Bright-Eyed Athena

Readers of *Bright-Eyed Athena* are invited to form a relationship with the ancient world in two distinct, and complementary, ways. On the one hand, Woff offers an account that weaves together particular stories from ancient Greek myth which often connect with Athena, starting with the story of Arachne (in the chapter titled "Spinning the Thread"), then turning to Pandora ("The Beginning of Evil"), then to Perseus' quest for the Gorgon ("The Deadly Glance"), followed by Persephone's abduction and Demeter's search for her daughter ("Pigs and Pomegranates"). The contest for Athens by Athena and Poseidon ("Gifts from the Gods") forms the subject of the next chapter. The story of the arrival of Erichthonios makes up the final chapter ("Athena's Children"). As the author told me in a personal comment, "I felt that a framing device was important, but didn't work out its nature in detail, with an explicit programme, but wrote it 'from the heart' as the father of two young daughters. I knew that I wanted to re-embed the myths in the ancient culture that produced them – I didn't want the myths to be decontextualized 'universal truths' or for children to perceive the Greeks as just like themselves, as there's no challenge in that".

Secondly, as readers make their way through Woff's narrative comprised of stories from Antiquity, they are able to learn about the ancient world through artefacts, all but one of which are in the British Museum and the J. Paul Getty

⁸ On Medusa as victim of sexual violence, cf. Bachvarova (2013). On the generation of sympathy for Medusa in Ovid's account (on which see below, n. 12), cf. Murgatroyd (2013, 108–109). A new turn in the reception came with H el ene Cixous' image of a "laughing" and empowered Medusa (Cixous 1976).

⁹ On Athena beyond the customary understanding of the "goddess of war and wisdom", cf. Deacy (2016).

Museum. This focus fits the remit of the British Museum Press’s “Looking at Myths and Legends” series, which was to present “[e]xciting new retellings of myths from around the world for children illustrated with photographs from museum collections” (Woff 1999, back cover).

From the start, Woff gives broadly equal weight to providing factual evidence about ancient Greece and to presenting the retellings of the stories. An opening section, “About Athena and Athens”, introduces both ancient Greece and the storytelling process, with an overview of Athena as a Greek, and specifically Athenian, deity, and about the Acropolis, the location of Athena’s Parthenon. This section then introduces the Panathenaia, the high point of the year for Athenians, and the high point in the worship of their goddess. Thus, the introduction sets out how the stories will relate to the goddess and her city and its inhabitants: “All the stories in this book link together with each other”; they also link “with the complicated, fascinating character of Athena, with her worship, her temples, her city and her people” (Woff 1999, 4). This section also creates a link between the ancient city, its goddess and its stories and the present day by a quick survey of the history of the Parthenon since Antiquity, culminating with the British Museum, the home of much of the sculpture: “Over the years, the great statue was taken away and lost in a fire and the Parthenon itself was converted first into a church and later into a mosque. After being badly damaged by an explosion in 1687, the temple began to deteriorate” (ibid.). Then, Woff continues, “[i]n the early 1800s, Lord Elgin, the British ambassador to Turkey, removed most of the remaining sculptures and brought them to London”. This, Woff concludes, is “where they still are, in the British Museum” (ibid.).

Therefore, the book is concerned with an ancient deity and the city where this deity was venerated. It is also concerned with London, where key sculptures from this city and its deity are housed, and where the reader can visit many of the artefacts. The same is true of most of the illustrations in the book, which are, likewise, of objects in the British Museum. At the same time that the readers are told a story set in the distant past, the book introduces artefacts that can be seen today at one of the world’s major museums.

Bright-Eyed Athena stands out from many books for children, and indeed from many books about myth and other aspects of children’s culture pitched at an older readership. Often, visual evidence is provided chiefly to illustrate the material being presented – as not that much more than pretty pictures, of secondary importance to the text. In *Bright-Eyed Athena*, however, the objects that appear in the book offer a complementary access to Antiquity. It could be that the purpose of the story is, even, to illustrate the *artefacts*. Thus, the book presents stories from ancient Greek myths narrated by the women who would tell, and weave, them, and the book includes a set of artefacts that illustrate both the women’s activities and the myths that Woff narrates. But *Bright-Eyed Athena* can also be used the other way around – the reader can negotiate the book from the opposite perspective, starting with the artefacts and using the text to form

their own relationship with mythology, history, and cultural heritage. How Woff presents Antiquity through storytelling and artefacts is commensurate with the museum as a site of inquiry rather than of authority.¹⁰

These two ways of presenting the ancient world are evident from the first chapter, “Spinning the Thread”. This “spinning” works at several levels. It concerns the world of the women who would engage in wool working together, while also telling stories that are, correspondingly, woven: “Every woman had her own style of telling, her own way of weaving the story” (Woff 1999, 6). The listeners would become “entangled” until, ultimately, they would be “hung there, still caught, waiting for the end” (ibid.). There was one woman, Stratyllis, who, working with “wool on her lips” (ibid.), an allusion to the spinning Fates of Catullus 64.316,¹¹ was the best storyteller of all. The story that Stratyllis spins is, itself, concerned with “spinning the thread”. It is the story of Arachne the expert weaver, who enters into a weaving contest with Athena and who, herself, ends up – not unlike the Ovidian Arachne at *Metamorphoses* 6.144–145 – “hanging by a thread to spin and weave her webs forever” (Woff 1999, 13).

Thus, the chapter introduces the women who spin tapestries and spin stories and it is concerned with the story about an expert wool-worker and her contest with a divinity skilled at weaving. The chapter also opens with a picture of a woman engaged in spinning (cf. Fig. 1, next page) which complements the introduction of the women. This comes soon after, in the narrative, the looms have been set up for the weaving contest. The reader is addressed directly, in the second person, and told, “on this wine jug you can see a woman spinning” (Woff 1999, 7).

Like all the captions in the book, the one here gives information about an aspect of ancient culture that stands up by itself: “The jug was found in a grave. Making cloth was one of the most important activities for a Greek woman. If the grave was a woman’s, the picture shows one of the ways she was expected to spend her life” (Woff 1999, 7). But while it is self-contained, the caption might also enhance the appreciation of the skills of Stratyllis and the other weavers and of Arachne and of Athena. And, likewise, it is possible to explore the fit between the illustration and the story from the other angle – and regard the story as a means to enhance the reader’s appreciation of the image.

¹⁰ See, here, the work of Erica Hateley on museology in children’s literature. This work is summarized in the workshop abstract, Hateley [n.d.]. I am grateful to Elizabeth Hale for introducing me to this work.

¹¹ This reference was supplied by Richard Woff in a personal comment, for which I am very grateful.



Fig. 1: Photograph of Richard Woff, *Bright-Eyed Athena in the Stories of Ancient Greece*, London: British Museum Press, 1999, 7, with permission of the Author. The image is an Attic white-ground oenochoe by the Brygos Painter, 490–470 BC, London, British Museum D13. Original image © Trustees of the British Museum.

Bright-Eyed Athena and Monster Theory

By discussing how the book deals with the activities of ancient Greek women, as represented in the narrative and as depicted via an illustration and its caption, I might seem to have moved away from monstrosity. However, this topic has, in fact, been at hand as I have begun to discuss Woff's book. The mundane world, where women perform their skilled labour, is in dialogue with another world, a world of the Beyond, which is distanced from the world of ordinary experience, yet which can break into this world. This is the case most overtly in what happens to Arachne who, “with a nod” from Athena, loses her humanity with vividness that is commensurate with Ovid: “Smaller and smaller she grew and her skin turned hard and black. At the same time her belly swelled and her limbs were drawn inside her until just her eight fingers stuck out” (Woff 1999, 13).¹²

¹² Cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 6.141–144: “[...] cum quis et naris et aures, / fitque caput minimum, toto quoque corpore parva est: / in latere exiles digiti pro cruribus haerent, / cetera venter habet” (“[...] her hair fell away, and so did the ears and the nose. The head now changed to a tiny ball and her whole frame shrunk in proportion. Instead of her legs there are spindly fingers attached to her sides. The rest is merely abdomen”, trans. David Raeburn in Ovid 2004, 216–217).

Woff echoes this transformation metaphorically in the experiences of the women as they listen to stories of Arachne and others and become “entangled” and transfixed until they “hung there, still caught, waiting for the end” (ibid.). This potential for the Otherness of extraordinary experience continues in “The Deadly Glance”. Another of the women, Kalonike, has woven a cloth bordered by “sphinxes, sirens and other winged monsters” (18). When she “stood gazing” at her work, a story concerned with the outcome of gazing at monstrosity, and which includes various serpentine associations, “snakes into her mind”. At times like this, a story, like a monster, “just came from nowhere” and “creep up on someone” (ibid.). The potential for Otherness to enter the mundane world is evident, too, in the final story. Here, Theano tells of the daughters of Kekrops, entrusted with Athena’s basket and told never to open it. When two of the sisters open the basket, again what they see is not endurable, and again what they experience is serpentine – the snake-child, Erichthonios. Their disobedience calls up Athena, furious again: “Inside the basket seethed the coils of a tongue-flickering human snake child. Then Athena’s howling fury, the incandescent brilliance of her presence, shattered the two girls’ bodies and shredded their minds” (45–47). Here Woff raises a question pertinent to understanding the ancient Athena, as disconcerting and even monstrous. Such aspects are often overlooked by those who emphasize Athena’s “other side” as a normalizer and a civilizer.¹³

To help interpret the layers of monstrosity in the book, I shall frame my study in relation to the Monster Theory proposed by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen as a means to explore cultures via the monsters they create.¹⁴

Woff’s representation of an Otherness that is never far from the world of ordinary experience makes a reading informed by Monster Theory appealing. This is an approach devised by Cohen as a means to explore not only monsters and their Otherness but also to move “toward understanding cultures through the monsters they bear” (Cohen 1996, 4). The monster, according to Cohen, is one that “dwells at the gates of difference” (7), sometimes in the land of the Beyond, sometimes crossing the world of humans. This aspect of the monster is germane to *Bright-Eyed Athena* where, as I have outlined, the world of the Other is never far away. Monsters can cross over into the world of humans. Conversely, humans can become monsterized. Deities, above all the bright-eyed goddess herself, chase monsters away, but this deity is also imbued with the monstrous. The deity inhabits “the gate of differences”, the monster’s dwelling place as offered by Cohen, allowing passage into the land where monsters dwell but

¹³ On the monstrosity of Athena and on why the goddess creates so many monsters, cf. Deacy (forthcoming).

¹⁴ Cohen’s call (1996) to read how cultures think through monsters has been addressed by specialists in a range of disciplines, cf., e.g., Mittman and Dendle (2012). For a recent representative example of a Monster reading in one discipline, Biblical Studies, cf. Grafius (2017). On Monster Theory and classical research, cf. Lowe (2015).

transforming the mundane world, where Lydian women weave cloth, or where women look after a basket, into a space where the monstrous intrudes.

According to Cohen, monsters defy easy categorization. They do not exist in their own right but “only to be read” (4). A monster like the Gorgon only exists because of what meanings it will carry. It is, also, “something other than itself” (ibid.). At the very moment when they look as though they can be defined, and pinned to a particular meaning, monsters disappear. But while “they can be pushed to the farthest margins of geography and discourse, hidden away at the edges of the world and in the forbidden recesses of our mind, [...] they always return” (20). This aspect of the monster – ever chasing us and yet ever being chased – is well captured on a wine cup, not in the British Museum this time, but in the Getty (cf. Fig. 2). Woff notes in the accompanying caption that this is “an unusual version of the story of Perseus” for while “we have many pictures of Perseus running away from the gorgons, [...] here he is chasing them” (1999, 23). I would like to push this further and suggest that it is not in fact clear who is doing the chasing, and who is being chased – or whether we are even meant to choose. It is more that they are all of them running in a circle, forever. Like Perseus, we might be “chasing mythical beasts”, but as we do all this, the beasts might also be chasing us.



Fig. 2: Attributed to near the Theseus Painter, *Perseus Chasing Gorgons*, Attic black-figure kyathos, 510–500 BC, J. Paul Getty Museum 86.AE.146. Digital image courtesy of the Getty’s Open Content Program.

Cohen also proposes that the monster brings Otherness to the mundane world as “difference made flesh” (1996, 7). The monster incorporates the Beyond, but it

originates within. Its Otherness can be cultural, racial, political, or sexual, including the Otherness invoked by women who overstep their gender roles. The monster “policing the borders of the possible” (12) punishing curiosity or mobility. If one leaves one’s official geography, one might be attacked, or, indeed, “become monstrous oneself” (ibid.). Monsters inhabit and represent a world away from the mundane world. They are hard to grasp, they signal difference and they function beyond the world of ordinary experience. They are hybrids, “forms suspended between forms” (6). Yet they are only called upon when normative roles are exceeded, as where someone challenges the dominant values of a culture.

Monstrosity: The Myths

Recurrently in the book, Woff’s characters go beyond their expected roles, or the roles that have been set for them. The consequences are dire. Thus, Arachne intimates that her skills are superior to those of Athena. This leads to Athena’s epiphany, but not – yet – to a monstrous Athena whose appearance or gaze or fury can lead to the punishment of the girl for her transgression. Rather, Athena appears as an older woman, someone not unlike the storyteller Stratyllis. Thus, at this point, Woff keeps the story in the real world, apparently devoid of gods, with Athena seeming to be not much more than a woolworker, just like the storyteller and her listeners and the other characters in the story, the Lydian women. However, the tapestry that Athena weaves points to another way in which Athena can appear, namely where she is angry – and bright-eyed. This is the story of the attempt by the Giants to usurp Athena and her Olympian family. Athena, at the centre of the tapestry, intervenes to stop the attack of Enkelados, one of the Giants, by uprooting Sicily, and throwing it on top of him before shouting a victory cry which puts terror into the heart of the other Giants.

What Woff’s Arachne weaves, meanwhile, is a story that, likewise, concerns the Olympians in general and Athena in particular. Just as Athena puts herself “in the midst of them all” (Woff 1999, 9) in her violence against Enkelados, so Arachne makes Athena central, and the Athena depicted here is just like the goddess that Athena wove: shouting, furious, warlike, and bright-eyed. The difference is that Woff has created this Athena as part of a narrative of sexual encounters. Arachne weaves a forest in which she depicts gods chasing young females. At the centre, on a “gorgeous flowered bank” (10), there is one such encounter, where Zeus lies with Metis. Then, somehow, Stratyllis weaves – the narrator does not say how – what happens next. Zeus hears that Metis will bear a child who will threaten him so he swallows Metis and then gains a headache so acute that he calls for Hephaestus to cut into his head with the latter’s axe. It is this act that unleashes an Athena, “in full armour, with a deafening war-cry, [...] the bright-eyed goddess” (12). And it is as such a goddess that Athena responds to the tapestry of Arachne – an Athena as violent and ferocious as at her birth –

and an Athena that is just like the goddess of the goddess’s own tapestry. That goddess had hurled something at Enkelados. This Athena again hurls something at hand, this time a distaff. And what happens to Arachne is comparable with what happened to Enkelados. Enkelados remains imprisoned under Sicily, groaning in his pain for perpetuity: “Even now you can hear the snorts and moans of Enkelados” (10). Arachne, too, remains hanging, “to spin and weave her webs” (13) for all time.

Woff’s Arachne weaves an image of what should be kept unrepresented. Her actions lead to an intervention by a furious Athena. This concern with keeping quiet about certain things that might be scandalous, or that operate at a level above ordinary experience, is contained in other stories narrated by the women. In the chapter “The Beginning of Evil”, Pandora, a young bride, weaving inside the home of her husband Epimetheus, leaves off her work, enticed by “tendrils of curiosity” (17) to open a box on the shelf. She does this despite a warning from Epimetheus, and which Epimetheus had himself heard from his brother Prometheus: “[...] it is better not to know everything; [...] some secrets are not to be revealed. [...] what is open to you is open and what is closed is closed. [...] do not seek to see what should not be seen” (ibid.).

In the chapter “Athena’s Children”, again a container is opened, and again the consequences are terrible, although this time only for those who open it and experience what is inside. The curiosity is that of two of the daughters of Kekrops. Along with their sister Pandrosos they had received a visit from Athena. This is an Athena concerned to hide her “radiance”, but who, not wanting to “dazzle” the girl, appears, again as an older, maternal woman, one of their mother’s servants, who “spoke to them softly and the three girls knew her voice”. Woff’s maternally-disguised Athena says to the girls: “You are like daughters to me. Your gifts and the care with which you tend my temple show me that I can trust you” (43–44). Having entrusted something to the girls, a fastened-up basket, she tells them to take it to her temple, then leaves. Woff expresses this disappearance, with Homeric echoes,¹⁵ in the appearance of an owl, that comes suddenly, screeches, and then scurries into something equally evocative of Athena, namely an olive grove. The owl enters the grove “and Athena was gone” (44). The second, owl, version, of Athena is illustrated via an image from a vase, showing a large-eyed owl staring out frontally between two olive sprigs (cf. Fig. 3, next page).¹⁶

¹⁵ See notably Athena’s disappearance as a vulture at Homer, *Odyssey* 3.371–372.

¹⁶ As the caption notes, “The ancient Greek word for owl was connected with the word for bright or gleaming, probably because of the owl’s large, alert eyes” (Woff 1999, 44). Does the picture necessarily follow the text? There is a possible disconnect between the owl of the story and the owl on the vase – if we regard the latter as looking calm or even friendly. However, this could be a response to owls as they are often experienced in contemporary popular culture, especially on items used or worn by girls, such as jewelry, keyrings, and T-shirts. This was true to a degree at the time

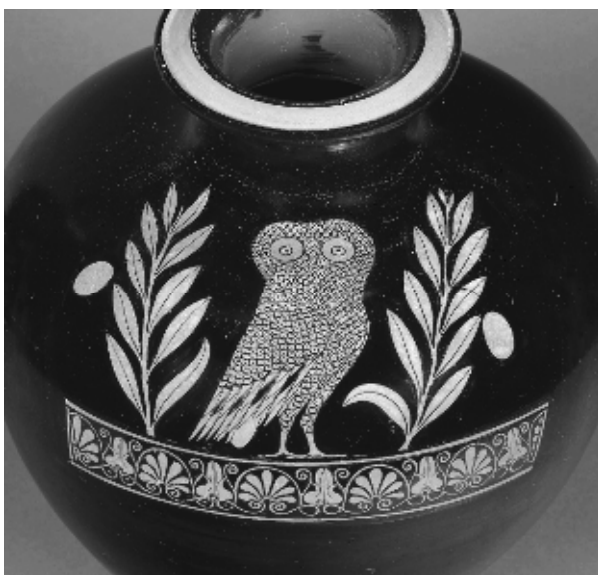


Fig. 3: An owl between two olive branches, from the Group of the Floral Nolan, Attic red-figure kalpis, 480–470 BC. J. Paul Getty Museum 86.AE.229. Digital image courtesy of the Getty’s Open Content Program.

Thus far, there have been two manifestations of Athena. One is a maternal Athena, who hides her dazzling presence. The other is revealed in sudden movement and a screeching noise. Then, in response to the sisters’ curiosity, Woff introduces a third Athena – the most ferocious and deadly that has appeared to date – and the final one that appears in the book, this being an Athena more monstrous than is usual in children’s literature. Again, this Athena has zoomorphic qualities – not as a bird this time, but in a fury that is “howling” (Woff 1999, 45). This time, the goddess appears in bright light, comprising “incandescent brilliance” (ibid.) which destroys both the bodies and the minds of the girls. Like the Kekropides as represented by ancient authors (e.g., Euripides, *Ion* 273–274; Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 3.14.6; for an overview, cf. Deacy 2008, 80–89), the

of the publication of *Bright-Eyed Athena*. Recent years, meanwhile, have seen owls attain a popularity that has not gone away though it might be starting to wane. But how Woff represents the owl in the caption – and how this caption resonates with the description of Athena’s epiphany to the Kekropides – might be offering a different way to read the owl on the vase, namely as evoking the bright, even dazzling or startling, gaze of the creature. I do not think that there is a need to choose – rather, as with the other artefacts in the book, space is created for readers to come to their own interpretations.

girls do not endure this encounter with an extreme version of the divinity of Athena.

Monstrosity and Girlhood

Bright-Eyed Athena is concerned, therefore, with the punishment of behaviour that is deemed not suitable – and, in particular, those who fail to behave appropriately are young women. I shall now turn to how Woff’s version of the Gorgon myth and other myths intersects with girlhood, including girlhood as it was understood during the 1990s, the age of “girl power”.¹⁷ Here, Cohen’s concept of a monster that “stands at the threshold... of Becoming” (1996, 20, stops in original) might become especially pertinent.

Woff wrote *Bright-Eyed Athena* motivated, not least as the father of young daughters, by an awareness of the dynamics of gender expectations and acculturations in the late twentieth century. According to the author, in a personal comment:

I wanted to get across that women in that ancient world must have been able to be strong in spite of their oppression, in spite of the stories that told of their limits. And I tried to come up with a way to do this dynamically, by focusing on the mode of transmission of the stories and the role of women in that transmission. So one source of strength is the women’s community/culture as women: in the book, they tell the stories to each other across generations and they have the last word on the meanings of the stories they have told.¹⁸

In *Bright-Eyed Athena*, stories can come from nowhere. As we have seen, they can “snake” into the mind as happened to Kalonike (cf. above, page 184). This concept of coming from nowhere is later echoed in the final story, when Erichthonios appears as though from nowhere, “from the shadows inside Athena’s temple” (Woff 1999, 47).

Others of the stories, conversely, come from somewhere – namely the ritual life of the women of Athens, a ritual life that begins in childhood. The chapter “Pigs and Pomegranates” is directly linked with the women’s ritual life. The narrator recalls how Stratyllis told her about the women’s festival involving buried pigs. Stratyllis then tells the story of the seizure of Persephone by Hades, Demeter’s quest for her daughter, and the eventual establishment of the Eleusinian Mysteries to commemorate and enact what took place, translating myth into ritual commemoration. Having longed to be an initiate, the narrator says that her wish has been fulfilled. This fact of her initiation is revealed at the

¹⁷ On girlhood, including in the 1990s, cf., notably, Aapola, Gonick, and Harris (2005) and Hains (2012).

¹⁸ From the personal comment of the author.

start of the penultimate story, “Gifts from the Gods”, where, again, the myth is narrated in the context of the ritual life of the city. The narrator recalls a time when, as a young girl in bed, an elderly female relative came home from watching the great procession to Athena’s statue. She tells the story of the contest between Athena and Poseidon for the patronage of the land that explains how, with Athena’s victory, this ubiquity of Athena first came about. Then, in the final chapter, “Athena’s Children”, the narrator tells of how, as an eight-year-old, she herself came to be selected to spend a year on the Acropolis in the service of Athena. Theano (the elderly relative and storyteller), the narrator says, “knew that the time was right” (43).

As Woff reveals, the time is right for her not just to serve the goddess but to come to understand what it means to serve the goddess in the first place. The story that Theano tells, of the Kekropides and the serpent child and the appearance of Erichthonios, fulfils this purpose. As I noted above, when Pandrosos reached the temple with the snake, two girls were selected in place of her sisters to help her tend the basket and, then, to create a robe for Athena. On the initiative of Erichthonios, the festival will take place each year “for all the people of Athens” (47), yet it originates in the secret kept by Pandrosos. Then, with Theano’s story concluded, the narrator listens to the women as they talk about their childhoods – childhoods which, for each of them, included participation in rituals around Athena. As one who was to be a servant on the Acropolis, the narrator states that she, too, “was about to become a thread in that web of women”. It was not necessary, she concludes, for anyone “to explain what it means to serve the bright-eyed goddess. When you hear the story of Pandrosos, you know” (ibid.). These are the final words of the story. It is a story told with an educational purpose, to provide knowledge and, specifically, knowledge that is concerned with terrible things and secret things. The lesson of Arachne turns out to be the narrator’s lesson – a warning to a young weaver who engages in the craft of the goddess. One concern of *Bright-Eyed Athena* is, then, with policing female behaviour and with what should be kept unknown, or secret, or unrepresented. Suitable behaviour is behaviour that does not share the knowledge it possesses – or at least that does not share it with those who should not be entrusted with it.

This concern with keeping certain things secret, or hidden, or unrepresented is evident, too, in the story of one further woman, Medusa. As narrated by Ovid, it was Athena who turned Medusa into the Gorgon, for having sex in her temple (*Metamorphoses* 4.793–800). For Woff, meanwhile, the monster just *is* – there is no back-story. However, Athena is motivated to help Perseus in the quest for her head because of some, never detailed, “old insult” (Woff 1999, 21) by Medusa. This lack of an explanation for Athena’s reason for disliking the Gorgon fits a concern elsewhere in the book with keeping certain things secret, or hidden, or unrepresented. This is in the conclusion to Theano’s story of “Athena’s Children”. Early on in the story, the “children” in question are the Kekropides, whom

Athena loves like a mother. But, then, another child emerges: the serpent child that the girls are given, hidden in its basket, to take to Athena's temple. Despite the uncovering by the sisters, the basket does indeed end up in the temple, and the third sister, Pandrosos, looks after it along with two replacement young women chosen by the Athenians. Some time later, on the death of her father Kekrops, a new king, Erichthonios, emerges, whose origins were a mystery: "[...] nobody knew where Erichthonios had come from. He had simply emerged from the shadows inside Athena's temple". It is not that people were incurious: "Some said that he was the son of Pandrosos. Some said that he was born from the earth itself", while others "said he was Athena's child, but that couldn't be". But, Theano says, and here her story ends: "Pandrosos kept the secret" (47).

I am going to end with the third story, "The Deadly Glance", because this enables me to reiterate or test some of what I have written to date. As Cohen says, it is risky to leave the official geography and enter the space of the monster. In the story, Perseus does just this – he enters the land of the Gorgons, and by entering this land, he goes into the space of monsters who fit the hybridity of Cohen's monster, with a "form suspended between forms", comprising snaky hair, "tusks sharper than boars' tusks, wings quicker than eagles' wings" (23). This world he enters is characterized by what it lacks. It is a "desolate place" (*ibid.*). There are no plants just "bare rock", and no water. In this space, avoided by gods, "there is only rock and sun" (*ibid.*). In this exemplary monstrous space there is death: "A single glimpse of a gorgon's face drains the warmth, softness and moisture of life" (21). It is in this regard that Perseus differs from the women of the book. He does not look. He is never monsterized. He returns unscathed from his foray beyond the official geography. But what he takes out of the land of the Gorgons has a monsterizing effect when Athena puts the Gorgon face on her aegis to "paralyse [...] with terror" (27). In this way, as well as displaying her victory over monsters, Athena monsterizes herself – adding a monster face to her assembled attributes.

The geography of the monster can be far away – as Perseus found, guided by Athena – or it can be close at hand, as a series of women discover owing to their own experiences of cults and rites of the goddess. The geography of the monster is only as far away as the temple of the goddess, where a young girl can serve the goddess and participate in a process that began in the guardianship of one who comes out of the shadows: a monster child. The "complicated, fascinating character of Athena" (4), introduced early on in the book, has been demonstrated in various ways. There is a women's Athena, and also a hero's Athena. There is a protective Athena, a maternal Athena, and a vengeful Athena. There is also an owl Athena, an Athena that manifests in a flashing, devastating flash of anger that destroys mind and body, and an Athena with a monster face.

Conclusion

Bright-Eyed Athena is concerned with the enculturation of children. There is the young girl whose encounters with stories and their tellers provide a framing device that turns out to be about her own incorporation into society. There are the characters of the myth whose enculturation tends to go badly wrong. There are the twentieth-century readers – and I would hope twenty-first-century readers if the book comes to be republished – who learn about ancient myth and culture and who are encouraged by the book to form their own personal engagement with classical mythology.

This enculturation takes a different turn from that taken in many other tellings of myth for children. On the one hand, stories are selected which concern the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and the pitfalls of transgressing cultural norms. Yet, on the other hand, *Bright-Eyed Athena* is a work where meaning grows gradually, building up to a final revelation which is... a secret. This offers an opportunity for children to learn something about myth often denied by modern retellings that present a linear account of ancient stories. This book's readers are invited to form their own relationship with ancient stories – to seek to fill in gaps and to engage their own imaginations. Woff does not reveal, for certain, what exactly, or who exactly, Athena is – nor any deity. Nor are we told, for instance, what the grievance was that Athena held against the Gorgon, nor how Erichthonios came to be.

The book opens up a world of myth, monsters, and of classical Athens, presenting characters that are embodied and yet elusive. Athena “seems to be everywhere” (Woff 1999, 43); Athena appears, then disappears after flying into an olive grove. The characters of myth enter, like Erichthonios, “from the shadows” (47). As for the young girl, she is enculturated into society, but the society is not the dominant one of classical, patriarchal Athens, but the sub-society of women, where there is knowledge that is known to, and kept from, the world of men. The men of Athens speculate on Erichthonios' origins; Pandrosos kept her knowledge whence he came secret. The girl becomes part of a world where women have a special knowledge that they weave into cloth and tell among themselves. As I said above, the book is concerned with policing female behaviour. It is also concerned with how women operate in ways unknown to the dominant culture. In this world of women who venerate a goddess, the monstrous – mediated by Athena – is never far away. Perseus needs to go to a faraway land to encounter the Gorgon but for the women, the boundary between the mundane world and the world of the Beyond is more fluid. These women have access to power – despite the stories that tell of their limits. The source of their strength is their communality and their culture as women. And these women have the last word on the stories they tell. The goddess of *Bright-Eyed Athena* is for all Athenians, but the goddess also presides over a gendered sub-society that operates on

its own terms, possesses its own knowledge, and passes this on to each new generation. As a work for the age of “girl power” this is exemplary.

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“She’s not deadly. She’s beautiful”: Reclaiming Medusa for Millennial Tween and Teen Girls?

There has been a significant trend in the literature of the last few decades¹ for revisionist retellings of history and myth for adults, from feminist and other perspectives that aim to “reclaim” the historical and mythical traditions for women and others who are subaltern characters within the dominant narratives of the time, such as Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), Carol Ann Duffy’s *The World’s Wife* (1999), or Margaret Atwood’s *Penelopiad* (2005).² Literature set in the classical world has had no lack of contributions of this kind, and this phenomenon has begun to be discussed in scholarship in classical reception studies.³ A parallel process has begun also in children’s and YA fiction based on classical stories, which however has received little if any attention in scholarship to date, because of the very recent birth of classical receptions in children’s literature as a sub-discipline.

In this chapter I explore this phenomenon, with a focus primarily on two books based for the “tweens” and teens markets that in various ways might be

¹ On the title: quote taken from Cixous (1976, 885). I would like to thank Helen Lovatt for reading and offering some very helpful comments on a draft of this chapter; Katarzyna Marciniak as editor for several valuable improvements; and the audience at Warsaw for the discussion and some useful suggestions. I have read the following English-language versions of the Medusa story for children of various ages: for younger readers – Davis and Gilpin (2014), Griffith (2011); for tweens – McMullan and LaFleur (2002); for teens/YAs – Hines (2013), Holub and Williams (2012), Powers (2014), which at the time of writing constituted the majority of such texts as I could find, excluding the sequels to the main two books by Holub and Williams (*Goddess Girls: Medusa the Rich*, 2015) and Powers (*Being Medusa*, vols. 2, 2015, and 3, 2017). I concentrate on the first books in these series focusing on Medusa, which were the only ones published at the time of the original paper on which this chapter is based.

² See Zajko (2006) and Doherty (2001, 21) on modern authors like Atwood as “reclaiming” a women’s classical tradition.

³ Of course, Ovid’s *Heroides* already fit this mode of reception within Antiquity. See the collection by Zajko and Leonard (2006) for scholarship in this field within classical reception studies.

said to “reclaim” the figure of Medusa: *Medusa the Mean* (2012) in the highly successful *Goddess Girls* series by Joan Holub and Suzanne Williams⁴ and *Being Me(dusa): And Other Things that Suck* (2014) by A. Lynn Powers. I begin with a general exploration of what might be behind such revisionist retellings of classical myths for children, including on the question of whether there are likely to be significant differences in the motivations for writing this kind of literature for children’s and YA market and for the adult market. In these two novels, the Medusa character is preoccupied with potential love-interests and relationships among her schoolmates, so that they can also fruitfully be read in light of the conventions and expectations of the high-school romance fiction genre that has flourished from the 1970s onwards:⁵ in some ways, the formulae⁶ of these successful romance plots are followed just as if our Medusas were regular girls attending regular schools, with their mythical monstrosity substituting for real-world reasons to single them out and make them unpopular with classmates. Comparisons with analysis of teen school fiction/romance plots will therefore be drawn throughout.

⁴ The *Goddess Girls* series is marketed to Middle Grade (8–12) readers, see, e.g., Williams (n.d.).

⁵ See examples such as the *Blossom Valley* (McLaughlin 2012–2017) and the *Sweet Dreams* (Conklin et al. 1981–1996) series. For an introduction to the genre see Christian-Smith (1990, 1–15; 1993). The 1970s saw the advent of a number of successful teen novels such as Judy Blume’s that portrayed girls’ high-school lives in a realistic manner, not flinching from discussions of and occasional instances of sex and relationships between the teenage characters; their realism has been seen as a forwards step in the contribution such novels made to the education of their readers, but they still employed a series of binary oppositions in characterizing different “types” of boys and girls, and reinforced gender stereotypes. From the 1980s onwards, the rise of teen romance is linked with the rise of a social conservatism that had influence over mass-market publishers, and such novels thus reinforced such binaries and social hierarchies even more strongly; cf. Christian-Smith (1990, 2): “[...] woven throughout teen romance fiction’s saga [...] is an accompanying discourse that a woman is incomplete without a man, that motherhood is women’s destiny, and that a woman’s rightful place is at home. These themes are part and parcel of the New Right’s political and cultural agenda regarding women, representing the conservative restoration of women to their *proper* place in society”. See further Christian-Smith (1990, 123–127). The *Goddess Girls* series is reminiscent of this more conservative 1980s period of YA fiction than of the 1970s or the Judy Blume “realistic” kind.

⁶ On the formulaic nature of teen romance plots, see Christian-Smith (1990, 133–135). Although there are obvious differences in the addition of classical myth characters to the school setting of many of these romances, the great volume of books available displaying such formulaic qualities means that many readers of such novels with a classical twist might well have read several examples of the more common genre too, and if so they could very easily recognize the ways in which these classical versions follow many of the same “rules”.

Introductory Remarks

Among mythical and historical traditions that have attracted a number of feminist revisionist retellings, the Greek mythical tradition is among those presenting the greatest challenges to this kind of exercise, since all its strong female characters are in some way monstrous or prodigious. They are “othered” and pushed to the margins by the dominant narratives, which equate the normal, the real world, and the rational with the Greek and the masculine, and the barbarian, the unreal, and the edges of the world with the feminine, as has been explored in depth by numerous studies (cf. Cixous 1976; Staley 2006).

Medusa’s most familiar narrative is a still more challenging case, even within this context: she is not only metaphorically or behaviourally “monstrous”, but literally and physically so; normal, human women are absent from her story (though the broader background includes several – Danaë, Andromeda, Cassiopeia – whose beauty brought them into mortal danger), and Medusa’s only function in the story while living is as an obstacle to be overcome on a heroic quest, a monster to be slain (and, in death, to be useful to the hero as a weapon).⁷ If revisionist retellings are a way of women (authors and readers) taking control of the traditional discourse by writing themselves into its centre and exploring their own identities, rather than remaining an “other” at the margins to be understood, if at all, by the androcentric tradition;⁸ if they are a means of “creating literary role-models which enable contemporary women to forge empathetic links with the women of the ancient world” (Zajko 2006, 46–47); these are harder aims to achieve with more or less faithful retellings of Medusa’s central story than with many female figures of Greek myth. When this has been attempted, it has usually been done by following the precedent already existing in Antiquity, namely Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, which gives Medusa a back-story as a human maiden who is unfairly transformed into a monster (as punishment for being the victim of rape by the god Poseidon), rather than a monster from birth or creation.⁹ Of

⁷ That is, if myth is the place where women can be explored among a set of discourses in which they are otherwise elided (as Cixous argued about women in Greek myth and society; cf. Doherty 2006, 299), the Medusa myth does not present itself as a potential medium for the exploration of women in Antiquity – at least, not until the kind of Ovidian revisionism discussed below.

⁸ As Cixous’ (1976) famous essay “The Laugh of the Medusa” argues.

⁹ Examples of revisionist tellings of the Medusa story for adults, which similarly exculpate her or present her in a more positive or sympathetic light, include Sylvia Plath’s (1981) and Carol Ann Duffy’s (1999) “Medusa” poems, and Cadnum’s (2006) short stories “Medusa” and “Give Him the Eye”. For adults, a revisionist telling of a different myth that similarly explores the punishment of women for men’s actions against them is found in the case of Penelope’s maids being punished by Odysseus for letting the suitors use them sexually, in Atwood’s *Penelopiad* (2005, esp. 163–168, the feminist lecture and “Trial of Odysseus” conducted by the maids).

course, an idea often implicit in this kind of argument is that the reader must, or wants to, be able to “identify with” the central character or with important characters in a story; as Vanda Zajko argues, this assumption requires much further exploration (2006, 46), since it is clearly only one of many ways that some readers might enjoy or engage with any given text, not the only or a necessary one. In the case of children’s literature, however, it has often been argued that such identification is a dominant mode of engagement with the text, from the earliest retellings of classical myth for children; cf., e.g., John Haaren’s preface to *Famous Men of Greece* (1904, 5): “The child identifies himself with the personage presented. It is not Romulus or Hercules [...] that the child has in mind when he reads, but himself, acting under similar conditions”.¹⁰ The gendered language in such early versions for children, along with the lack of positive female central characters for girl readers to identify with, is one reason for the modern revisions of myths that rehabilitate the reputation of classical female characters.¹¹

When it comes to children’s revisionist retellings of classical myth, there are a great many recent examples focusing on (versions of) Medusa, often giving her a sympathetic or even a positive treatment (with or without the Ovidian backstory to “justify” it), or even making her the central character of an extended narrative. So far as I have found from a survey of Medusa stories in English-language children’s/YA literature,¹² this forms a far greater proportion of classical myth retellings for those markets than Medusa stories do among their adult equivalents. Is this something to do with the qualities or potential of the Medusa figure and what she can offer to adult and younger audiences, or just a chance trend?

In the case of our two Medusa romances, I would argue that the combination of the target age range and the romance genre makes reader identification with the protagonists one of the most important reasons, if not the most, for a story’s

¹⁰ See Hodkinson (2019) for discussion of this and further examples in children’s versions of the Herakles/Hercules myth.

¹¹ See Lovatt (2018, 277) for one girl, age 9, “straightforwardly identif[y]ing” with a range of strong female characters of stories with and without classical models; teen girl romance readers interviewed by Christian-Smith (1990, 98–116; see further below n. 13) and by Willinsky and Hunniford (1993, esp. 92–99), whose results showed that a far greater proportion of girls than women readers of genre-fiction romances (22/42 vs 5/42) claimed to read them because they wanted to have a romance like that of the heroines’.

¹² See below, Primary Sources, for books included in the survey. The Our Mythical Childhood Survey of international sources includes so far 86 examples in various languages (as of January 2019). I was unaware of Tera Lynn Childs’ (2012–present) *Medusa Girls* series until late in the production process of the present book.

appeal and success, rather than just one among many.¹³ The *Bildungsroman*, to take another example of a subgenre or mode (often combined or overlapping with romance) that features a number of modern Medusa revisions including our case studies, is particularly appealing to children at some stage on the same journey to adulthood (or to older childhood) that the central character(s) are represented as undergoing, and such readers can look forward to themselves attaining the older state at the end of this trajectory, with its greater privileges and freedoms, and/or with parallel difficulties and challenges in their own and their favourite characters’ lives successfully overcome.¹⁴ If it is true that reader identification with the central figure is crucial to this kind of literature, then it ought to be more challenging to treat the monster Medusa in an appealing way for younger audiences than for adults, since it entails inviting the reader to identify with this monstrous character.

Children’s literature that offers revisionist interpretations of classical myth has two common features that make Medusa a perhaps more appealing figure than might be expected: one is simply that more or less humanized or rehabilitated monsters are common characters, and the main characteristics of their classical counterparts and the main features of their stories are very often playfully adapted and drastically altered to various effects, not least the pleasure, amusement, and sometimes surprise of subverting expectations of their monstrosity: think of the monsters in the extraordinarily popular *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak (1963), or in the *Monsters, Inc.* films, directed by Pete Docter (2001–present); for wider examples of the phenomenon, and among classics of children’s literature, compare the civilized, “domesticated” classical

¹³ Christian-Smith’s interviews (1990, 98–116; cf. also 1993a) with female teen readers about their interaction with high-school and other teen romances demonstrate that identification with the central female characters (see esp. 1990, 112–113) – learning about boys and relationships from their experiences, and wanting to share those experiences themselves in the future – is the primary reason for reading them (see further 1993, 52–54 and Willinsky and Hunniford 1993 on reasons girl readers enjoyed teen romances, including both identification with the heroine and “escaping” to the world of the fiction, and learning about romance and dating). To the extent that these novels are essentially teen romances in an altered setting featuring mythical beasts (which is substantial), the same factors very likely apply to readers’ enjoyment, with the additional interest of the classical element (minimal in *Being Me(dusa)* in any case). There are far more examples of the romance whose conventions these classical twists follow, so that many readers of our Medusas may be familiar with the formula and read these novels in the same way, mentally leaving aside the mythical beast additions in identifying with Medusa and learning from her experiences.

¹⁴ For the *Bildungsroman* genre in teen/YA works related to classical receptions, see Hodkinson (2018, 81, n. 11) with further references; e.g., the Harry Potter series as part *Bildungsroman* (Westman 2011). For *Bildungsroman* features and functions of teen romance genres, see n. 13 above on learning through/from such novels.

beasts such as centaurs in C. S. Lewis' *Narnia* (1950–1956).¹⁵ This of course is something that goes back at least to Ovid, in his often playful humanizing of Medusa as of other “monsters”.¹⁶ Some of the modern children's Medusas are simply creating their own version of this trope, and in some cases in which they are part of a series treating several mythological monsters in this way, it is no surprise that Medusa is given the same treatment.

Ovid's version of Medusa is likely the most influential on modern retellings, as is often the case with Greek myth:¹⁷

Excipit unus
 ex numero procerum quaerens, cur sola sororum
 gesserit alternis inmixtos crinibus angues.
 Hospes ait: [...]
 “Clarissima forma
 multorumque fuit spes invidiosa procorum
 illa: neque in tota conspectior ulla capillis
 pars fuit [...].
 Hanc pelagi rector templo vitiasse Minervae
 dicitur. Aversa est et castos aegide vultus
 nata Iovis textit; neve hoc inpune fuisset,
 Gorgoneum crinem turpes mutavit in hydros.
 Nunc quoque [...] pectore in adverso, quos fecit, sustinet angues.” (*Metamorphoses* 4.791–803)

One of the princes asked why, of all the sisters, only Medusa had snakes twining themselves amongst her hair. Perseus replied: “[...] Medusa was once renowned for her loveliness, and roused jealous hopes in the hearts of many suitors. Of all the beauties she possessed, none was more striking than her lovely hair. [...] the lord of the sea robbed her of her virginity in the temple of Minerva. Jove's daughter turned her back, hiding her modest face behind her aegis: and to punish the Gorgon for *her* deed [emphasis added], she changed her hair into revolting snakes. To this day [...] the goddess wears as a breastplate the snakes that were her own creation.”¹⁸

Some of the details of Ovid's account are picked up by many of the modern versions for children and YAs, in various combinations: the fact that she is the only one of the three sisters to have snakes for hair; Athena's unfair punishment of her for Poseidon's rape; the beauty of her hair in particular before her trans-

¹⁵ On *Narnia* and its “domestication” of mythical beasts, see Harrison (2010).

¹⁶ Cf. also Theocritus' Polyphemus in *Idyll* 11, for an even earlier treatment. Cf. Lowe (2015).

¹⁷ See Roberts (2015) for Ovid's *Metamorphoses* being the most frequent ultimate source for collections of Greek myths for children.

¹⁸ Trans. Mary M. Innes in Ovid (1955, 115).

formation into the Gorgon; and the aetiology for Athena’s Gorgon-head breast-plate – each of these features in several recent versions, with more or less imaginative reworkings. These details lend themselves to revisionist accounts that focus on either jealousy or rivalry between Athena and Medusa because of her beauty, the unfairness of her being punished for a rape of which she was the victim, or on her continuing beauty – snakes apart, or sometimes, “snakes and all”! In some ways, Medusa lends herself to such revisions simply because of how she can be portrayed – she is not bad-looking, for a monster, with her anthropomorphic form, and blends in with the humans or gods in the various fictional schools she attends, in a way that many classical monsters could not. At minimum monstrosity, she can be portrayed as fully human, apart from the snakes (which can be tied back or covered) and the ability to petrify; the latter is often worked around by giving her some form of glasses to protect classmates and other humans.¹⁹

The second common feature of note here is that there is a large and ever growing subgenre in children’s and YA literature of books that more or less overtly aim to address *difference* and “othering” (and the various kinds of bullying behaviour that stem from it) of all kinds, often representing characters singled out or picked on for their differences as overcoming this treatment in some way. Medusa is an ideal protagonist for this kind of story: traditional aspects of her monstrosity can be figured as any of several types of difference for which a modern child might be treated differently, including gender-specific bullying or discrimination (by boys or by other girls) but also, and more frequently, such common traits as being a “loner”, or a “geek”, or “nerd”, and generally not feeling as if she fits in, often simply as part of a representation of tween or teen “awkwardness” along with more individual characteristics; having a visual impairment and needing (often particularly large and striking) eyewear at all times; being otherwise physically different and differently abled (the hair-snakes, the petrifying power) – this ties in with “disability” historically often being labelled as “monstrosity” in othering and discriminatory discourse. Her physical appearance is even figured as ethnic difference by some authors. When it comes to otherness, some of these modern Medusas have it all: this makes the Gorgon in fact not a difficult character to work with, but the ideal figure to encourage young girls and young readers generally to identify with, in order to show her learning to live with or overcome being treated differently, or discovering her self-worth, in line with the similar real-world YA subgenres of the high-school romance and the *Bildungsroman*.

¹⁹ In this feature there is likely to be some contamination from comic-books’ (and their film adaptations’) traditions of characters with a powerful gaze, as was suggested by the audience at the Warsaw conference: e.g., Cyclops in *X-Men*, who without his visor would emit a destructive optic blast from his eyes.

Monstrosity as Difference

Monstrosity, or prodigiousness, is essentially “abnormality” or difference. These modern Medusas are “different” and stand out from the rest of their schoolmates in a range of ways that make them sometimes just a slight twist on the usual children’s story set in a school, focusing on a child who is singled out or bullied. In some cases she is singled out because of her appearance, but this turns out not to be because she is hideous, but because the boys are attracted by her looks, and the other girls are jealous of and therefore threatened by her. In such cases, her unique appearance finds an analogue in the striking attraction to the opposite sex of protagonists in non-mythical school fictions for girls – an attraction which is not always recognized by the girl herself nor acknowledged by her jealous female classmates. Several versions of Medusa combine many of these kinds of difference, which can be more or less related to the archetypal monstrous features of the classical Gorgon and her story. At one end of the spectrum we find stories that could be of the growing pains of a millennial adolescent or younger girl, regardless of her monstrosity:

A contemporary millennial girl with very special problems... (Hines 2013, ebook blurb)

That is, they substitute one or more of these kinds of everyday, real-world “difference” (including positive difference, when her striking looks turn out to be attractive and not hideous) for Medusa’s monstrous features and powers. But the more interesting versions for our purposes attempt to integrate those monstrous features and powers into the way Medusa is different and the reasons for her being bullied or unpopular at school.

Teen Medusa (a): *Goddess Girls: Medusa the Mean*

This novel begins with a prologue in which we see Medusa aged 6 being bullied by her classmates – including the same punning name-calling found in *Say Cheese, Medusa*: “Gorgon-zola” (McMullan 2002, e.g., 163). The bulk of the novel focuses on Medusa age 13, as a student at Mount Olympus Academy, where she is singled out by being one of the few mortals among the pupils. Despite being mortal, however, when she spends time among “ordinary” mortals, she is also singled out by her appearance: she *is* a terrifying monster, to them – this Medusa has green skin, eyes, and snakes/hair. Thus she does not fit in with anyone, but is lonely and unpopular everywhere she goes. As the blurb puts it: “Queen of Mean... or misunderstood? [...] deep down, Medusa just wants to fit in” (Holub and Williams 2012).

The *Goddess Girls* series borrows many features from the popular high-school romance series: they are aimed at a female audience, and each features a

central female protagonist with whom the reader can identify. Relationships with boys are a major part of the series, as well as the dynamics between the female schoolmates, and how those two sets of relationships affect one another: the *Goddess Girls* “navigate friendship, first crushes, and adventure at Mount Olympus Academy”²⁰ – all features that are typical of the girls’ school/romance series. *Medusa the Mean* is no exception to this formula.

As a teenager at school with the gods and goddesses, Medusa simply wants to be popular, and specifically to have the attention of the object of her affections, her “supercrush” Poseidon. Instead she is – or perceives herself to be – unliked by all, a “freakshow” (68). The features of her monstrous nature are not especially important in this book in some respects; being different is in part being a mortal at a school for immortals, which also means that she struggles to keep up with her work in comparison with her classmates (26). Another aspect of her difference lies simply in her being an awkward adolescent: she is blunt, which sometimes earns her rebukes for being “Mean” from others, but she sees this as telling the truth: “[...] what was so mean about telling the truth?” (133). She is also different from the other girls specifically, in that she is not a “girly” (i.e. stereotypically feminine) girl, and does not understand their obsession with weddings and cooing over small children.

Because of the immortal nature of all the children she goes to school with, among whom her “monstrous” appearance in itself is not so out of place as it is among ordinary mortals, she is not singled out as much for her snake hair and petrifying gaze in this novel as in many others. These central aspects of Medusa’s monstrosity do feature, however. The petrifying gaze means that she has to wear “Stoneglasses”, which “she always carried” (66). These were invented by Athena for mortals to wear as protection against her gaze, in fact, but the protection works with her wearing them too, so that she has to have them with her all the time. Because the petrifying effect only applies to mortals and not to her divine classmates in this universe, this does not play an important role in the plot.

Her snakes are similarly not a significant feature for most of the plot, but when they become so, this bestial feature is a crucial part of her difference and acceptance – or lack of acceptance – by individuals who are important to her. First her “supercrush” Poseidon suggests hiding them: “could you maybe wear a hat... or a veil?” (198–200). This makes her very angry. Around this point, when she has finally begun to receive the attention she craved from Poseidon, she begins to realize that she does not like him so much after all, and after the snake covering suggestion, we are told that she “realized how shallow Poseidon was” (200).

Conversely, it is Dionysus who ends up winning her heart, because he accepts her for who she is, including her green skin – he twice refers to her as

²⁰ General marketing blurb for the series, e.g., Simon and Schuster, Inc. ([n.d.]).

“greenie girl” in contexts in which it is clear that he likes her (212, 237) – and the bestial nature of her head of hair which acts independently from her: in a slow dance with her at the wedding of Zeus and Hera, her snakes begin to munch the bouquet that she has caught, and Medusa “was pleased to note that he didn’t seem the least bit weirded out. It made her like him even more” (38). These archetypal Medusan features play alongside her difference as a less stereotypically feminine girl – an aspect of her which is similarly accepted by Dionysus:

[Medusa] ‘Do you think I come on too strong?’ [...]
 [Dionysus] ‘Sometimes.’ (175)

However, as Dionysus turned to leave, she thought she heard him add: “But I like it” (175). Acceptance of and being understood for who she is, “snakes and all”, is clearly important: when she thinks no one likes her, she takes comfort in the friendship of her snakes – a common motif to many of the Medusa revisions: “She trusted them and could be herself around them. Something she couldn’t do with anyone else” (44).

The idea of the snakes as living, conscious creatures is also exploited in another, more unique way: as a part of Medusa with a mind of their own, the snakes seem to represent a subconscious part of her, or since she is perhaps a creature with multiple brains, a parallel consciousness, which recognizes her desires before she consciously recognizes them – or before the human brain part of her does so. When Athena thanks Medusa for an act of kindness, “[a] warm feeling spread through her... a feeling that she usually only got when she was cuddling her snakes” (159). The snakes seemed to be her only friends before, but now she is moving towards friendship with some of the popular goddesses who did not like her, or so she previously thought. Similarly, they display an instinctual level of interaction with others separate from her conscious perceptions of them: “Her snakes flicked their tongues at him [Mr. Dolos – a tricky salesman], which meant they didn’t trust him. Usually they were right about people” (72). Indeed, they turn out to be quite right in this case. Most importantly, though, there is throughout the plot a series of interactions with Dionysus in which it is clear to the reader that he is or might be interested in her, but her self-perception, and the fact that she has *consciously* decided that Poseidon is her “supercrush”, do not allow her human/conscious brain to notice or later to believe this. The snakes, though, are ahead of her (as it were): they notice Dionysus and stay fixated on him, possibly also drawing his attention to her, while she has tried to duck out of sight underneath a window: “Her curious snakes were standing tall, still peeking out the window glass above her. She tugged them down” (203). Poseidon, her “crush”, at first does not realize she is interested in Dionysus (see pages 169, 136, 118–121).

Medusa the Mean ends up accepting her lot, and being accepted for who she is by others; she does not get what she wants at the beginning of the novel –

immortality (except for one day) or Poseidon – but she realizes Dionysus is a better person, as he accepts her green and snake-headed nature, and she makes friends and becomes more popular, growing in self-belief. There are clear lessons from the authors to girls identifying with our heroine, which are largely positive: if being a “monster” with bestial features stands for being different and singled out by others, acceptance and popularity are gained nevertheless, and there are people who will like you even if you are different. This is only partly true, however: she begins “just wanting to fit in”, and does end up conforming a little more to traditional gender norms at the end, desperately diving for the wedding bouquet, just like the “girly girls” she previously did not understand or identify with. There is no suggestion in this book (as usual in the *Goddess Girls* series) that being accepted by, and emulating, the most popular girls in school is not a valid life goal in itself,²¹ while Dionysus, though he apparently likes the fact that Medusa is blunt and awkward, criticizes her for upsetting a young Andromeda when she simply tells her the truth. There is no alternative group of “different” kids who form a separate group (whether goths, emos, or any other group or clique) and be “awkward” together; rather, the cool, popular kids, and their acceptance and approval, are the only things that matter. Altogether, there is a mixed message, then: Medusa *can* be accepted, despite being different in appearance and differently abled, and liked for who she is to some extent; but at the same time, those who get to be the “normal” ones, in comparison with those like Medusa defined as “weirdos”, are allowed to keep their place as arbiters of who is to be accepted within the school as a person or as a girl, with no room for alternative ways of being on the larger scale.

This is no surprise when we compare the *Goddess Girls* series with the highly successful high-school romance series that paved the way for it (albeit without the classical content). As Linda K. Christian-Smith and others have observed of the latter genre, they typically do nothing to challenge, but rather strongly reinforce binary oppositions and norms of gender, and conventions about what girls must do and how they must behave in order to get a boyfriend, nor to challenge the idea that this should be all girls’ primary aim in life.²² The *Goddess Girls*

²¹ As in teen romance series, whose readers consider that both heroine and hero should be “popular” in order for it to be a good example of the genre (Christian-Smith 1993a, 54–56).

²² Indeed, they do not typically deal with difference or diversity of any kind; see Christian-Smith (1990, 16–29) on the “code of romance”: romance in this genre is always a heterosexual practice, and “is a transforming experience giving meaning to heroines’ lives and endowing heroines with prestige”, while being essentially “about the dominance of men and the subordination of women” (17). Cf. Gilbert (1993, 72): “The romantic construction of femininity [...] [is] connected to the heroine’s quest for love – for domesticated male sexuality – and the resultant qualities of femininity such a quest is seen to demand”. Cf. also Davies (1993, esp. 145–147) on the

series and *Medusa the Mean* conform to this pattern of teen romances: there is only one way to be female, liked (by both boys and girls), and successful, which is to be conventionally and heteronormatively feminine in appearance and behaviour towards male and female classmates. If monstrosity in this book stands for real-world kinds of difference or otherness, both physical and character-based, then girl readers identifying with this Medusa cannot entirely avoid the lesson that they ought to change or cover up some of their differences in order to be accepted and achieve what they want. Furthermore, the message is very clear that fulfilment is only possible through the goal of finding a boyfriend, even though that is not what Medusa wants at the outset and she does not understand or want to be like the girls who feel that way. In the world of the *Goddess Girls*, as in many high-school romance series, no alternatives are possible,²³ and the education process of the *Bildungsroman* is always to discover this and to grow into someone who fits in with this pattern.

Teen Medusa (b): *Being Me(dusa): And Other Things that Suck*

This novel focuses on an older Medusa, who begins the novel age 15 (Powers 2014, 72), and markets itself as YA (copyright page), dealing as it does with mature themes. The plot outline is essentially very similar to that of *Medusa the Mean*, substituting a classmate called Donny for the figure of Poseidon and one called Pearce for Dionysus, but set in a world much more like the real world, with little explanation for how a child with snakes for hair could belong in it. This prevailing realism perhaps allows for greater reader identification with the

heteronormative gender (and other) binaries reinforced by romance novels. On racial diversity, see n. 28 below.

²³ Christian-Smith (1990, 23): “Romance endows girls’ lives with meaning and importance. [...] heroines are singled out and given recognition by virtue of becoming a ‘girlfriend’” and (25): “it is the single experience that gives their lives meaning, [a] pattern established in [...] early romance novel[s] [...] [and] even dominating current romance fiction”. See also Gilbert (1993, esp. 70–72, with further references cited on p. 70). On the idea that such novels actively reinforce norms in real girl readers who identify with the heroines, see further Christian-Smith’s interviews with teen readers of romance (summarized 1990, 134–135): “Although [...] the readers established various meanings for the romance novels they read, they mostly accepted the novels’ versions of social relations. They never disputed the desirability of becoming a girlfriend and recapture that moment of heterosexual specialness through their continued reading of romances [...]. Romance reading does not alter girls’ present and future circumstances, but rather is deeply implicated in reconciling them to their place in the world”; and Gilbert (1993, 85): “stories such as these [...] inevitably define parameters of possibility for many young women; they are [...] limited in the ‘doll-like’ versions of femininity they are able to construct”. Cf. Christian-Smith (1993a, 56–59); Davies (1993, 159–169).

characters and situations in the novel, which would probably not work very well with a slightly older version of the Mount Olympus Academy children.

There is an afterword “From the author”, which makes the kind of suggestion many of these YA Medusa books do both implicitly and sometimes also explicitly and didactically,²⁴ as here, about monstrosity being like a form of (real-world) difference:

I feel [Medusa] is just a misunderstood soul who was wrongly judged and labeled a monster based on her appearance, which she had no control over. Maybe one day the rest of the world can learn to love her and her snakes as well. (170)

The dedication of the book sells the “misunderstood” central character of the novel to readers who would identify with her:

For all of you outsiders in the world. And introverts. And compulsive list-makers. (non paginated)

This Medusa is similarly a bit of a “loner” and a “geek”, and has a suggestion of OCD (obsessive-compulsive disorder) traits, liking to make lists to try and feel in control of her life: these lists begin each chapter. She is subject to bullying by most of the school because of her different appearance, and also feels herself to be different; she assumes her different treatment is because of disgust at her snake hair, not realizing that she is actually attracting attention from all the boys and jealousy from all the girls in school. She *is* discriminated against because of her appearance, but because she is extraordinarily attractive, not hideous;²⁵ her

²⁴ YA novels have a tradition of including overt didacticism in paratexts such as an “author’s note” or the blurb along with an implicit lesson in the story itself; cf. Cherland and Edelsky (1993, 36–37) quoting an example called *The Trouble with Wednesdays* (Nathanson 1987), labelled YA on the spine, whose back cover states “this book is about learning not to let grownups abuse you”. This genre is labelled the “issue novel”, attempting to deal with social problems in a direct way for teens/YAs; see Wolitzer (1987) for a critique of two such including Nathanson (1987). Compare what Willinsky and Hunniford (1993, 90) describe in the “new realism of [Judy] Blume” et al. in the 1970s era of teen romance as the “social mission in the loyal representation of as much reality as young readers are believed to be capable of ingesting”. More recent teen/YA novels and children’s fiction more generally have moved back in this direction again, including representation of a multitude of kinds of difference in child and other characters, after the more conservative 1980s.

²⁵ This is another typical feature of the girls’ romance genre; see Gilbert (1993, 71) on the teen romance heroine: “She is [...] always attractive, although she may not initially think so and needs external reflection/verification of her feminine/romantic appearance”; see further (75) on “falseness” about romance novels’ heroine’s beauty on the part of other girls. Cf. also Christian-Smith (1990, 43–55) on heroines’ beauty in such novels in general: often this takes the form of “plain” heroines undergoing

lack of self-awareness means that she does not realize this at first, and then has difficulty believing it when she has it pointed out to her towards the end. Pearce asks her: “Have you ever noticed how the only people who say bad things about you are girls?” (151).²⁶ She had *not* noticed it, in fact, but when prompted to think, realizes that this is true. He goes on: “Girls are intimidated by you because boys are mesmerized by you. [...] You’re mesmerizing to guys. They’re practically hypnotized by you” (152).

Medusa’s feeling that everyone is against her is reinforced by the fact that she is frequently getting in trouble with the school disciplinarian, Dr. Daiki – often because she “freezes” fellow students who provoke her by taking off her glasses. They do not turn into statues, but remain “frozen” only for a short time, depending on how long she makes eye contact with them.

The kinds of “difference” displayed and hinted at in this version of Medusa are often much more connected with the archetypal bestial features and prodigious powers. The ability to “freeze” people means that she, too, has to wear special glasses, which singles her out as looking like someone with a medical condition – a kind of difference like any other that can contribute to being singled out at school, as well as a heightened self-perception as being “different”: “They’re not exactly sunglasses, but they are more reflective than standard glasses and shield my eyes all the way around like those silly glasses some people have to wear for hay fever allergies” (15).

She is branded a “weirdo” by classmates (8), and frequently overhears comments about her appearance and her ability to freeze people. In this older, YA version, these can be far more unpleasant. When she is accidentally run over by Pearce in his car, she hears students gossiping about it saying: “Too bad she only broke her leg” (48).

Medusa begins the novel with no friends, but makes some by the end, just like the Medusa in *Goddess Girls*. Much of the plot revolves around the staging of the school play. When she is selected to play the lead role, one of the more jealous girls starts a petition to get her removed from the play, supposedly since she is not a good representative of the school because of her appearance and having “dangerous” creatures growing out of her head. This girl, Thea, is the

beautification through “make-overs” and “heroines feel that no boy could possibly care for them *as they are*” (my emphasis; cf. the importance of ultimate acceptance of Medusa as she is, to different degrees, in Holub and Williams’ and in Powers’ stories). The modern teen Medusas do not undergo the same kind of “make-overs”, however, but gradually realize that they are attractive as they are, from an initial assumption that they are not stemming from how others perceive and treat them. In this respect, the modern Medusa stories demonstrate progress in line with the romance genre since the period Christian-Smith focuses on: it is no longer the place of the heroine to realize that she is unattractive and ‘fix’ herself, but to realize that, even if different and not “conventionally beautiful”, she is valued as she is.

²⁶ See Gilbert (1993, 75) on this as a feature of teen romance novels.

girlfriend of Medusa’s friend and crush, Donny, but Medusa does not realize what this is all about, equating it with all the usual childish teasing.²⁷ Thea has to explain herself to the school disciplinarian, Dr. Daiki, in Medusa’s presence and says that Medusa “does not meet adequate standards” (105). His response makes the implicit point that her being picked on for her *specific*, “monstrous” physical nature is part of a wider genre of discrimination, against anyone who is different in appearance or ability:

[Daiki:] ‘So what you’re saying is, students at this school who have a physical difference should not be treated equally as other students who don’t have a physical difference?’ [...]

[Medusa:] ‘[...] it’s kind of the point I’ve been living with my whole life.’ (107)

Her snake-haired nature also gives a novel twist to the implication behind the adolescent jibe: “Does the carpet match the drapes?” – which Medusa hears several times – “[f]ollowed by either gagging or immense laughter” (148).

Finally, she is subjected to some stereotypical discriminatory treatment because of a difference in skin colour, which may or may not have anything to do with her being a Gorgon. The questions from a nurse when she goes to hospital make use of the euphemisms “interesting” and “exotic” to refer to her different appearance from that of the majority of the local population, to which she responds in very blunt manner:

[Nurse:] ‘[...] your last name is Gordon, but you don’t really look like a Gordon, so I thought that maybe your family came from somewhere a little more, I don’t know, interesting.’

[Medusa:] ‘Are you asking me where I’m from, or are you asking me why I’m brown?’

[Nurse:] ‘[...] why do you have such a common name when you look so exotic?’ (23–24).

Her snake-haired appearance is not commented on explicitly, which at this point in the novel allows the reader to think of Medusa’s difference as racial difference, as the glasses do with a difference of ability or a medical condition.²⁸ The

²⁷ Given space for further development of this chapter’s themes, the relationship between Medusa as romance heroine and Thea as the rival could be demonstrated to be in many ways typical of the girls’ school and romance genres: the rival girl is typically more proactive and advanced with boys, but the heroine is “less assertive”, and her “goodness [...] is demonstrated through her forbearance in the face of romantic difficulties” (Christian-Smith 1990, 86, see further 80–97).

²⁸ Ethnic diversity in the largely formulaic girls’ school/teen romance genres was not high in the bulk of the examples surveyed up to 1990 by Christian-Smith, and thus nor are instances of discrimination or conflict such as this, though more recent examples have improved the trend; likewise, teen girl readers surveyed by Christian-Smith of

fact that she is a classical “monster” transposed into the real world, rather than a character who has just one specific real-world difference for which she is discriminated against, allows Medusa’s difference to stand in for a range of real-world differences at various points in the plot.

Almost exactly as in the *Medusa the Mean* version, the two potential partners for Medusa react very differently to her snake-haired difference, in ways that show their true colours: Donny does not accept her for who she is, is put off by the snakes, and asks her to cover them up, while Pearce²⁹ likes them and accepts her appearance and different nature unquestioningly. Donny and Medusa go on a date, in which the snakes get a little lively and knock over a plant pot, getting soil everywhere. Donny says: “Maybe we need to tie those things down”, which Medusa recognizes as a joke but doesn’t find funny. “You know, like how other girls put their hair in a ponytail?” (76–77). He needs her to alter her different appearance – to hide her “otherness” in order to be acceptable; and he cannot bring himself to talk about the snakes, always referring to them as “things”. Later, in discussing her appearance for the school play, he says: “It’s part of the character. [...] we have to cover up your... um... head, somehow. You can’t go up on stage with your... um... things sticking out everywhere” (95). She is shocked – she hates talking about her snakes at all, but: “If someone *is* going to talk about them, they can at least have the common decency to refer to them as they really are” (95, emphasis in the original).

Pearce then comes to the rescue and shows he understands why they cannot be covered with a wig, and is not afraid to refer to them as they really are – just like Dionysus in *Medusa the Mean*, accepting Medusa as she is. She finds out later that he actually keeps pet snakes, which he had mentioned much earlier but she had not understood: “I didn’t know he meant that he actually had snakes.

African-American background, and in general of any background other than white middle-class American, did not feel that these kinds of novel represented their experience. See Gilbert (1993, 71): “Usually [the romance heroine] belongs to no ethnic group or religion, and exists in a buffered unreal social group where money and privilege are seldom discussed”. Of course, for the largely white, middle-class authors of the bulk of such mass-market teen girl romances, what Gilbert describes as belonging to “no ethnic group”, etc., means that they are assumed to be white and middle-class as the authors, and make no attempt to represent other identities – white being the “unmarked” identity as opposed to groups “othered” by means of ethnic, class, or other differentials. See further Christian-Smith (1990, index *s.v.* “Race”; 1993a, 54). The classical novels surveyed here of course have species or larger differences (humans, gods, monsters, etc.) rather than focusing on ethnic difference, but as explored in this chapter, these might sometimes overlap with or stand for a range of other kinds of difference, including ethnic.

²⁹ Katarzyna Marciniak suggests that Pearce’s name evokes Perseus, thus subverting the mythical Perseus–Medusa relationship as mortal enemies.

I thought it was some kind of metaphor for having problems or something... I stare at them, stupefied” (141).

The fact that his having snakes might be thought by Medusa a metaphor for having problems is telling, both about her, and also in a metaliterary fashion, about the way the book uses this marker of difference to stand for a variety of real-world causes both of self-perceived difference and of bullying.

The importance of being able to be herself, and to be accepted as a person, with her differences, comes across clearly also from a conversation with her first real friend, Pearce’s sister, Erin. Medusa does not like talking about the snakes at all, but Erin points out that in fact she *is* talking to *her* about them; she responds: “I guess I just feel comfortable around you. You’ve never made a big deal out of them [the snakes]” (80).

Again, exactly as in *Medusa the Mean*, Medusa’s snakes function as a kind of subconscious or parallel consciousness. This device is developed more fully in *Being Me(dusa)*, though. We are introduced to the idea at the beginning: “I have no physical sensation in my snakes. [...] but somewhere in the depths of my brain I have some little inkling of what’s going through their minds... Curiosity, contentment, discontentment. That’s pretty much the span of their emotions” (8). They display interest in the two main boys in the story, before she realizes in her conscious mind or human brain what that interest might mean, or even that she is interested; we might read the hair-snakes’ collective mind as standing for her subconscious. So first of all with Donny, whom she knows she likes, she observes: “[...] this one [snake] on the right keeps sliding off in Donny’s direction” (15).³⁰ Later, with Pearce, whom she does not realize she is interested in, but later turns out to be the far better match for her, she notices:

[...] my snakes all seem to be really excited about finally getting out of the house, and they are in an especially curious mood today. At one point, I actually catch four of them at once all slithering in Pearce’s direction... (55).

She attributes this behaviour of her snakes to mere curiosity, but nothing more. Similarly she is unaware that she likes Pearce on some level – or some part of her likes Pearce – in the next quote: “[...] the snakes are watching [Pearce] as he passes. They do that a lot when he is around. I think there is something about him that they like” (95). Note that she says *they*, the snakes, like him, rather than admitting any awareness of liking him herself (or in her conscious/human mind).

The snakes in *Being Me(dusa)* are in a kind of symbiotic relationship with Medusa, as in *Medusa the Mean*: they share feelings of contentment or interest, curiosity, and wariness. But because they are just feelings or instincts, rather than articulated, conscious thoughts, Medusa can misread them and be misled in how

³⁰ Cf. above, page 206 (quote from Holub and Williams 2012, 203) for her snakes in *Medusa the Mean* showing very similar curiosity about her crush.

she interprets these feelings, since she follows her conscious mind's interpretation of the world sometimes – just as Medusa in *Medusa the Mean* questions whether she can be interested in Dionysus, when she has decided that Poseidon is “her supercrush”. In both novels, as well as being a marker of difference, the snakes are used by the author to explore the teen Medusa's awakening curiosity about boys, and her unconscious desires as separate from, but in another way intrinsically linked with, her human or conscious brain. This idea is developed more fully in *Being Me(dusa)*, in part because of the age of the character and the target audience, which allows for a slightly more complex and a more (young) adult exploration of her feelings. Her realization of what the snakes' feelings mean comes late in this novel also because of her feelings of difference and her experience of bullying: she cannot imagine she is attractive to boys, and does not understand the jealous rivalry between Donny and Pearce, and thus misreads Donny's intentions and character until it is too late.

When Medusa goes to a party for the first time, confidence boosted by new-found friendship and acceptance, a consensual kiss with Donny leads to a sexual assault by him. Uniquely among the modern revisions of Medusa for YAs of which I am aware, this story includes the sexual violence that is central to Medusa's story in Ovid³¹ – including the fact that it is *she* who is punished for it, not in being transformed, this time, but in being the subject of gossip and so-called “slut-shaming”,³² in a very modern twist on this story. Donny's jealous ex-girlfriend, Thea, videos the assault on her phone, and nearly everyone in the school sees it – including the school disciplinarian, who supports Medusa and

³¹ The others' omission of sexual experience fits the general trend in classic girls' school fiction and romance genres; see Christian-Smith (1990, 33–41, esp. 33–35) on the primarily non-physical, psychological nature of the romances: “Although some interest [in] and knowledge of sex is allowed in later romance fiction, in the end the novels define girls' sexuality as distinctly nongenital” (33).

³² Girls' school fictions and romances tend to avoid portraying girls engaging in sex (see previous n.) and, where classmates or others know or believe that a girl has had sexual relations, they censure or punish them for it (Christian-Smith 1990, 80–97); heroines have to live “within a carefully circumscribed description of femininity, one that extols caution, selflessness, and seeming *passivity*” (89, my emphasis), i.e. they are not to pursue or show sexual desire, or engage in sexual activity, and are blamed and/or shamed for doing so. Some teen/YA fiction portrays rape or sexual assault, rather than consensual sexual activity, but then usually as part of a different genre of scary story, rather than romance, or the “issue novel” genre, with an overtly didactic message about avoiding and/or reporting violence or threats of violence. See above, n. 25; Cherland and Edelsky (1993, 36–42), who note also that some books in the popular and successful *Sweet Valley High* series of teen girls' school fiction (which broadly belong to the “romance” genre) incorporate the threat of rape, which however is averted. Medusa's experience of sexual assault is combined with the usual features of the romance plot in *Being Me(dusa)*, thereby achieving a subtler form of didacticism than the “issue novel”.

takes her to the police. She receives comments at school like: “I knew you were a slut” (133). The bullying this time is thus specifically gendered bullying, which blames and shames the victim, just as the classical Medusa was punished by Athena, who turned her head away in shame, for being raped by Poseidon. She receives “dirty looks” and hand gestures from other students, and says: “I can’t understand why everyone is acting like I am the disgusting one” (133).

Being Me(dusa) thus keeps the Ovidian version’s sexual assault, but challenges its victim-blaming through showing the all-too-realistic modern reaction to what happens, portraying a no less discriminatory society in this version of our own world than the world of classical gods and monsters. Rather than merely realizing that the one she likes is “shallow”, as in *Medusa the Mean*, this older Medusa experiences far worse; and rather than eliciting sympathy from the girls in the school, who envy and are intimidated by her, this version adds another, far more unpleasant, gendered and sexualized element to her bullying. But also unlike *Medusa the Mean*, this Medusa finds acceptance and friendship and potentially more among a different group of friends and with Pearce, and all of them together take her side and realize that Donny, Thea, and all the popular crowd are shallow, truly “mean” people, whose approval is not worth having.

Being Me(dusa) therefore has a more positive message than *Medusa the Mean*, while developing a very similar use of the classical monster Medusa. It allows traditional binaries, hierarchies, and conventions to be challenged and questioned to a large extent, rather than reinforcing them,³³ and is thus more

³³ NB though that it conforms with the general trend in girls’ school romances in that the boy takes the lead in romance and the girl responds passively, almost never expressing desire for the boy herself (Christian-Smith 1990, 33–35); in this way, the fact that Powers’ Medusa figure does not realize (consciously) that she is attracted to Pearce, even though part of her (the snakes) does, might be seen as helping to maintain the traditional norms to an extent too; however, it is (as often in such romances) a story about a *first* experience of desire, and so this kind of self-realization, coming to recognize consciously for the first time desires that are present subconsciously (in the snakes’ minds), could instead be seen as in part an exploration of adolescent change, and a function of its being the first experience of its kind for the protagonist. But this too is part of the typical male-dominated pattern of the romance genre; cf. Christian-Smith (1990, 39–40): “[the genre] privileg[es] romance as the set of relations in which heroines’ sense of their own sexuality arises and where their knowledge of sexuality is acquired. [...] girls’ sexuality is dormant up to the moment of romantic specialness [...]. At the juncture of the moments of romance and specialness, the heroine becomes both sexually aware and subjected to the male power and control underlying sexuality. This represents the heroine’s incorporation into the power relations underlying heterosexuality [...]. This control is buttressed by the books’ insistence that boys are the only legitimate objects of girls’ desires”. See further Christian-Smith’s (1990, 98–116) analysis of her interviews with girl romance readers, which demonstrates in readers identifying with fictional heroines a “tug of

accepting of the differences or otherness that Medusa's "monstrosity" represents in these novels. If readers are identifying with the central character, they are more likely to learn that they can be accepted as they are, and do not have to change to be what schoolmates or boys expect them to be in order to gain social or romantic acceptance.

The level of realism about sex and teenage growing pains as well as the more positive message is reminiscent of some of the 1970s teen fiction, such as that of Judy Blume, analyzed by Christian-Smith and others following her. But, being written in an era in which acceptance of difference is more often promoted, it does not reinforce, but rather seems intent on challenging, norms: the author's message, combined with the metaliterary references to the snakes being a symbol of the problems Medusa experiences, suggests an overtly didactic purpose of the book, namely to show girls who identify with Medusa's struggles how they might be overcome, as well as in teaching all readers to accept all the many kinds of difference (race, ability, etc.) that this Medusa seems to represent one after another. At the same time, because it is not made explicit that Medusa partakes of real-world "othernesses" for which real-world readers might experience discriminatory treatment (being of a different colour and wearing her special glasses, are, on the surface, attributes of her being a Gorgon, and not direct equivalents to these characteristics in the real world), Powers is able to explore multiple kinds of real-world "otherness" and reasons for bullying and differential treatment in the one figure. And because the novel's protagonist and setting are not quite the real world of the girl reader – Medusa does have snakes in her hair, and can freeze others with her gaze, even though most features of both (the protagonist and the setting) could readily be found in the real world and equally in school fictions and teen romance novels – Powers can treat the sexual assault and the victim-blaming and more generally misogynistic culture that it brings to light in a somewhat safer environment, and perhaps more realistically, than might be comfortable for some teen/YA girl readers (and for some adults who purchase books for them), had the novel simply been set in the real world.³⁴

war between conventional femininity and more assertive modes" (112); and Christian-Smith (1993a, 56–59).

³⁴ In some ways, of course, even romance novels set in the real world create this kind of safe environment for exploration of these topics: see Christian-Smith (1993a, esp. 52–59) on teen/YA readers' ways of and reasons for engaging with these texts: "The novels operated at a distance from young women's own lives and provided a comfort zone where there were no consequences for risking all for love" (53). See above, n. 13, on learning about all aspects of dating and romance being one of the main reasons cited by teen girl readers for enjoying formulaic romance novels, from which these classical novels borrow several features.

Conclusions

This pair of versions of Medusas, in many respects very similar, belong to a small “spike” in the graph of appearances of the Gorgon in more or less similar recent children’s and YA versions. All of them use Medusa’s monstrous or bestial features and prodigious powers to mark her out as different, and therefore to subject her both to her own un-confident self-perception as not “normal”, and to the different treatment and bullying of others, or simply unpopularity, because of that difference. Within the context of the uses of mythical beasts in children’s literature, all of the set of Medusa stories I have read take advantage of Medusa’s Ovidian human back-story and far more human appearance to make her less a mythical “beast” or “monster” of the kind that might be encountered by child protagonists in an adventure story, say, and more (almost) one of the children in their respective fictional worlds. In this regard, Medusa’s bestial or monstrous features are played down and/or played with, in a manner familiar from many depictions of traditionally monstrous or bestial characters in modern children’s literature and media (from C. S. Lewis’ friendly centaurs and fauns to *Where the Wild Things Are* and *Monsters, Inc.*).

What is particularly interesting about this almost-human or humanoid monster Medusa is the way in which her (smaller-scale) bestial or monstrous features are frequently used to as analogues for other kinds of difference, and consequent different treatment – fear, bullying, shaming, and so on – which real-world children might experience, whether that be differences of race or ethnicity, ability, or more vague differences of appearance. (These are integrated into the actual snake-haired and petrifying features of Medusa to a greater extent in some, such as *Being Me(dusa)*, and less so by others, including the *Goddess Girls*.) Many of these books give the snakes characters and independent actions of their own, but these two novels in particular use this to portray Medusa’s unconscious or parallel consciousness, as the snakes are part of her but also have their own, simpler minds, which experience emotions rather than articulated thoughts.

Furthermore, the placing of a teen Medusa-figure into a school fiction setting, with these differences from her classmates and experiencing these “othering” and discriminatory behaviours because of them, allows the authors to adapt a standard trope of the school-fiction/teen (girls’) romance crossover genre: in many of these stories, and especially in *Medusa the Mean* and *Being Me(dusa)*, the Gorgon’s “monstrosity” is (among other things) an analogue for a common kind of difference which *strikes* or is *remarked upon* by female and male classmates in different, stereotypically gendered ways; namely, her difference is that she appears “striking” or “remarkable” in a positive, attractive sense to the boys, and thus evokes jealous reactions in the girls, which leads to unpopularity, bullying, and low self-esteem (particularly but not only in relation to her appearance). In all of these texts, then, despite the classical Gorgon Medusa seeming at first sight to be a difficult protagonist for child readers to identify

with, in fact her quasi-humanity means that she is in some ways the *ideal* mythical beast for thinking with, about some of the difficulties and differences that modern teen/YA fiction often wants to explore and represent.

Of the two novels focused on in this chapter, *Medusa the Mean*, as the rest of the *Goddess Girls* series – and like the majority of the non-mythical girls' school novels and teen romance novels to which it owes a great deal – primarily serves to reinforce conventional gender norms, even as it attempts to give Medusa the Gorgon a happy ending with greater popularity and acceptance. Girls reading teen/YA romances and identifying with the heroine in her quest for romance learn to construct their femininity along the lines of Hélène Cixous' (1986; cf. Davies 1993, 159–169) set of binary oppositions, in opposition to the male “other”, just as the myths that these classical versions of the romance genre follow construct the female as the “other” to the male hero on *his* quest. In this way, some revisions of the Medusa myth for girls that place Medusa at the centre as the heroine, and yet prescribe for her the kind of romantic quest familiar from countless teen romances, may thereby end up reinforcing norms of gender and sexuality no less than the classical myth in which female equals “monster” and “antagonist” to the male hero's quest – only far more insidiously, because they do not explicitly make her a monster, and *seemingly* give Medusa central importance in her own life-story and quest. This is the case in the *Goddess Girls'* Medusa and a feature of much of that series, but is far less a feature of *Being (Me)dusa*.

Being Me(dusa), by contrast, does not portray the Gorgon as having to change and conform to gender norms in order to “fit in” and be accepted; rather, Medusa is accepted for who/what she is. Furthermore, this novel is the only version I have found so far that tackles head-on the classical myth's episode of sexual assault by Poseidon on Medusa, and this adds another element to the message of acceptance of difference that many of these modern versions are more or less overtly or didactically bringing to the story: the particularly gendered and sexualized bullying is because of Medusa's attractiveness (a feature retained from the pre-transformation Medusa in Ovid), and portrays the reactions of Medusa's modern (especially female) schoolmates as no less sexist in blaming and shaming the victim than the reaction of Athena in Ovid. This draws upon another hint already there in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, that the girl Medusa was blamed for something that was perpetrated *against* rather than *by* her.

It is precisely by tackling the sexual assault that *Being Me(dusa)* explores the misogynistic treatment of Medusas ancient and modern, as gendered bullying and discrimination; and it is by portraying the sexual assault upon Medusa and the subsequent “victim-blaming” and “slut-shaming” that it highlights the prevailing, patriarchal cultures not only of ancient Greece but of modern society and its school-yards. This novel is thus a feminist revision of the Medusa myth, in the manner of Atwood's *Penelopiad*, but aimed at tween to teen/YA girls, set in a world and written borrowing features of sub-genres far more familiar to

them. The choice of Medusa in this novel for teen girls, as well as the choices to portray her “bestial” features as “otherness” of various kinds, and the treatment they provoke as gendered, all work together in *Being Me(dusa)*, enabling Powers to explore difficult and sensitive topics like these in a somewhat safer way, since the Medusa figure both is and is not like a regular girl in the real world of the reader.

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BABETTE PUETZ

“What will happen to our honour now?”: The Reception of Aeschylus’ Erinyes in Philip Pullman’s *The Amber Spyglass*

“My principle in researching for a novel is *read like a butterfly, write like a bee*”, says Philip Pullman in his “Acknowledgements” section of *The Amber Spyglass* (Pullman 2000, 549), the third and last volume of his trilogy *His Dark Materials*¹ (1995–2000). Much has been written on the wide literary heritage that Pullman draws on, unsurprisingly with a special focus on his use of John Milton, William Blake, and Christian sources, but also ancient sources (e.g., Hatlen 2005; King 2005; Matthews 2005; Scott 2005; Smith 2005; Haldane 2006; Holderness 2007; Oram 2012; Robinson 2004). However, his use of Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* for the Underworld scene has been largely ignored.² The aim of this chapter is to fill this gap, as a comparison of Pullman’s Harpies with Aeschylus’ Erinyes helps understand both groups’ conversion into kindly beings and the maturation which Lyra, the protagonist of the trilogy, undergoes in order for this change to be possible and meaningful.

This chapter will start with a summary of Pullman’s Underworld passage, a brief look at its ancient sources (especially the *Aeneid* and also the *Odyssey*), and a comparison of the Erinyes and Harpies, in particular regarding their appearance and role. It will then look at how both groups of goddesses are persuaded to change their ways and are renamed, and at which cosmic changes are caused by these divine conversions. Finally, the chapter will examine how Pullman employs the Harpies to bring about Lyra’s character development and to reflect on the use of persuasion and the act of storytelling itself.

¹ *His Dark Materials* = Trilogy of *Northern Lights/The Golden Compass*, *The Subtle Knife*, and *The Amber Spyglass*.

² Exceptions are the brief comparisons by Oram (2012, 430); Colbert (2006, 133–139); and Syson (2017, 233–249).

Plot Summary and the Underworld's Description

Pullman's *His Dark Materials* epic fantasy trilogy tells the story of 12-year-old Lyra Belacqua and Will Parry, as they travel through parallel worlds. It is a coming-of-age story in which the author draws on, but inverts John Milton's epic *Paradise Lost*, by endorsing original sin as an important part of humanity.

Lyra lives in a world similar (and parallel) to our own, but with some differences, most importantly the great political influence of the very controlling and oppressive Church of her world and the fact that in Lyra's world all humans have animal-shaped daemons, which are physical manifestations of each person's inner self. Children's daemons shift shape until, in puberty, they settle into a permanent form. The Church suspects a connection between the settling of a daemon's form and original sin (which special devices can detect in the form of visible elementary particles, referred to as "Dust"). A faction of the Church, the so-called Gobblers, become obsessed by the desire to find a way to stop this process. Lyra's mother, Mrs. Coulter, is part of this group and leads experiments on children to separate them from their daemons before puberty in order to avoid them being subject to original sin.

In the first book of the trilogy, *Northern Lights* (or *The Golden Compass*, in the American edition) Lyra is given an alethiometer (a truth telling device) which she is able to read intuitively. When she learns that the Gobblers have abducted her friend Roger, Lyra travels to the far North in order to free him and the other abducted children from Mrs. Coulter's research station. Lyra and Roger then travel to her father Asriel to give him the alethiometer, but he kills Roger and at the same time blasts an opening into another world. In that world, Lyra meets Will who is on the run from the police in his own world and has, by coincidence, found his way through an opening into the same world as Lyra. Will acquires the Subtle Knife (also the title of the second book) which enables him to cut openings into other worlds. He and Lyra travel together until Lyra is kidnapped by her mother. Mrs. Coulter now realizes the mortal danger the Church poses to Lyra. The Church sees Lyra as the second Eve and plan to kill her before she can commit original sin. Since Lyra is totally estranged from her mother, Mrs. Coulter drugs her into unconsciousness to keep her against her will.

In the third and last book, *The Amber Spyglass*, Will rescues Lyra from her mother and together, the two children and two Gallivespian Spies (the Chevalier Tialys and the Lady Salmakia from the Gallivespian universe – little proud informers sent by Asriel to keep an eye on the children) travel to the land of the dead in order to find Lyra's friend Roger, so she can apologize to him for not saving him from Asriel, and for Will to speak to his father who died just after they were reunited after many years of separation. When the children enter the land of the dead, they have to undergo a painful separation from their daemons (in Will's case from his inner daemon). They eventually find Roger, manage to appease the Harpies who control this realm and, with their help, create a way out

of the Underworld through which they themselves leave and all spirits of the dead can from then on escape the land of the dead. While the two children are in the Underworld, Lyra’s parents destroy Metatron, the Church Authority’s Regent, and both die in the process. When Lyra and Will free the Authority himself, who had been kept captive by Metatron, he dies from old age.

Having escaped the Underworld, the children succeed in reuniting with their daemons and fall in love with each other. However, they discover that they will never be able to live together, as each can only thrive in their own native world and all windows, except for one single exit from the Underworld, must be closed for all worlds to stay healthy.

The Underworld in *The Amber Spyglass* is depicted as a gloomy and hopeless place, a prison camp, so far below the ground that it is hard for Will to find a spot where he can cut into an aboveground place in another world. Pullman’s land of the dead is full of ghosts who forget their own story and identity as time goes on. In contradiction to what the Church of Lyra’s world has been teaching generations of humans, the same fate awaits everyone after death, no matter how virtuous or pious they have been in life (Pullman 2000, 335–336). The description of the Underworld as a dark, unpleasant place draws heavily on ancient descriptions of the Underworld, most notably Virgil’s *Aeneid* (6.268–899) and also Homer’s *Odyssey* (11.218–222 and 488–491),³ including details such as a Charon-like ferryman and Harpies. The gloominess of Pullman’s Underworld reminds one of *Odyssey* 11.488–491, where Achilles states that he would rather live unfree and in poverty than be the king of the dead. In all three of these texts the bodiless ghosts have a consistency like fog and cannot be touched by the living. One significant difference is that the ancients’ belief held that some particularly heroic humans are able to avoid the Underworld and instead move to the Isles of the Blessed, whereas in *His Dark Materials* one and the same fate awaits everyone after death. Another noteworthy divergence between ancient descriptions of the Underworld and Pullman’s Underworld is that in the modern work there are multiple parallel worlds besides Lyra’s world and the Underworld. This is crucial as it enables the children to cut an exit from the world of the dead and for the ghosts to escape and float apart,⁴ becoming

³ Virgil’s *Aeneid* 6.374–375 mentions “amnemque [...] Eumenidum” – “the river of the Eumenides”, i.e. Cocytus (cf. Pharr 1998, 331).

⁴ Graham Holderness claims that it is at this point that “we witness a transition from the classical journey to the underworld, to the Christian Harrowing of Hell” (2007, 284). While the passage indeed draws on this Christian theme (and subverts it), there are also classical parallels of characters wishing to free people from the Underworld, such as the myth of Orpheus, Euripides’ *Alcestis*, and even Aristophanes’ comedy *The Frogs*. However, in these examples specific dead characters are to be freed, not all dead in general. The actual setup of the Underworld is not challenged.

part of everything.⁵ There is no such hope for the dead in the ancient Underworld.

One of *His Dark Materials*' central topics is the fight against the oppressive Church in Lyra's world which uses people's fear of death to control them. When Lyra and Will see the horrible fate the dead have to endlessly endure, in particular being tortured by the Harpies, who remind the dead of all their bad deeds whenever they are trying to find sleep, the two children, out of pity, decide to free the dead. This is also the moment when Lyra and Will are shown to fall in love (Pullman 2000, 319). It is important because Lyra and Will's falling in love, as well as Lyra's resulting "Fall" are, according to a prophecy, a crucial part of the downfall of the oppressive Church.

Names and Origins

Before comparing the Erinyes and Pullman's Harpies, it is necessary to explain why the two groups can be juxtaposed, despite their different names and mythological origins. Aeschylus' play, the last part of his *Oresteia* trilogy, bears the title *Eumenides* and in it feature the Erinyes (chthonic goddesses of revenge) who later are renamed the Semnai or Semnai Theai (1041). Thus, in the *Oresteia*, three different names are linked with these mythological figures. The title of the play, *Eumenides*, never appears in the tragedy itself, as the play seems to only have become known by this title in the late fifth century BC, by which time the terms Eumenides and Erinyes seem to have become interchangeable.⁶ The name Eumenides means 'the kindly ones', referring to their transformation from enforcers of blood-revenge to guardians of justice in Aeschylus' play. It is surprising, that, in the surviving text, Athena officially announces the Erinyes' new name not as the Eumenides but as the Semnai Theai. In fact, the Eumenides' cult, as described by the goddess, reminds one very much of that of the Semnai Theai, a separate group of deities who were associated with the protection of suppliants (Sommerstein 1989, 11). In particular, both groups of goddesses are

⁵ Their individual identity vanishes at this point. This foreshadows what eventually will happen with Lyra and Will's individualized love-bond (cf. Russell 2003, 70). About the consistency of this idea with Buddhist teachings, in particular the principles of interdependence or "interpermeation", see Loy and Goodhew (2004, 117). In contrast, the souls fluttering in the air described at *Odyssey* 11.218–222 keep their distinct identities.

⁶ Cf. Euripides in his *Orestes* of 408, where he calls the creatures following Orestes four times each "Eumenides" (38, 321, 836, 1650) and "Erinyes" (238, 264, 582, 1389). They are called "Eumenides" both before and after the trial in Euripides' play (cf. Mitchell-Boyask 2009, 24; and Sommerstein 1989, 12). Before the *Orestes*, Euripides does not call them "Eumenides", so that it is likely that the two names, "Erinyes" and "Eumenides" were fused between 414 and 409 (cf. Sommerstein 1989, 12).

associated with the Areopagus, live in a cave on the Acropolis, and receive sacrifices.⁷ Aeschylus probably was the first to identify the Semnai with the Erinyes (ibid.).

During Aeschylus' life, the Erinyes, Eumenides, and Semnai Theai were associated with each other and also with similar creatures, such as the Harpies (Mitchell-Boyask 2009, 25).⁸ Also later, in Virgil (*Aeneid* 3.252), the Harpy Celaeno calls herself “Furiarum [...] maxima”. The Harpies in Greek myth are winged human-bird hybrids, very similar in appearance to the Erinyes (except for the wings), and just as revolting and frightening. They are best known from the myth of Phineus whose food they spoil as a punishment until the Boreads Zetes and Calais drive them off.⁹ The close association of both is obvious when the Erinyes are compared to “female creatures robbing Phineus of his dinner” at *Eumenides* 50–51.

As the names of such similar monsters were used somewhat interchangeably already in Antiquity and these two groups have such striking similarities, it is worth comparing Aeschylus' Erinyes and Pullman's Harpies. Employing the Erinyes would not work well for Pullman's story, because they are goddesses of revenge. Pullman for his story needed permanent residents in the Underworld¹⁰ who would torment the ghost of any deceased, no matter how he or she behaved in life.

The *Aeneid* and the *Libation Bearers* as Pullman's Sources

Lyra and her companions encounter the Harpies almost immediately after landing on the shore of the land of the dead, even before they can pass through the doorway into the Underworld proper (Pullman 2000, 304–308). A Harpy flies at them, screams, and derides them, including a grotesque mock-kiss (305). Pullman's Harpy-scene clearly alludes to *Aeneid* 3.211–262: Virgil's Harpies swoop down on the human visitors. Their screeching, stench, and the way they instil fear and hopelessness are emphasized. They cannot be wounded. However, as opposed to Pullman's nameless Harpies, Virgil's main Harpy has a name

⁷ A difference is that the Semnai Theai are mostly known for giving sanctuary to suppliants (Mitchell-Boyask 2009, 25).

⁸ Cf. also Eisenhut (1979, 640–641, s.v. “Furiae”) about the common confusion in Antiquity of similar creatures.

⁹ Cf. Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica* 2.178–300: here the foul stench the Harpies pour over Phineus' food is emphasized (2.191). Aeschylus has dramatized this myth in a play produced in 472 (with *Persians*), cf. Sommerstein (1989, 90). As to its etymology, Harpy comes from ἀρπάζω – ‘seize’, fitting this myth well (Sauer 1979, 944–945, s.v. “Harpyien”).

¹⁰ The Erinyes appear above ground but threaten to pursue Orestes even into the Underworld (*Eumenides* 175 and 267–268).

(Celaeno) and – in contrast to Pullman’s Harpies who turn out to be eager to listen to stories – Celaeno gives Aeneas a grim prophecy.

In Pullman’s book, the main Harpy’s threat to torture Will’s mother with nightmares (Pullman 2000, 305) exemplifies what they do to the ghosts of the dead: torturing them with intense feelings of guilt and shame. Here the Harpy pounces upon Will’s guilt of having abandoned his mentally ill mother. The idea of torturing people, as well as their relatives, by means of their feelings of guilt and nightmares closely resemble Orestes’ frightful visions of the Erinyes at the end of Aeschylus’ *Libation Bearers*, the second part of his trilogy, after he has committed matricide.

Pullman’s description of the Harpies in his *Amber Spyglass* draws heavily on the depiction of the Harpies in the Underworld in *Aeneid* book 6.¹¹ In both works, the Harpies are found at the doors of the Underworld (Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.286; Pullman 2000, 304). While Pullman foregrounds the Harpies as the only creatures instilling fear in the land of the dead, in the *Aeneid* they are one of a number of terrifying monsters. The most important difference is that in Virgil, the Harpies (and the other monsters in the Underworld) are just bodiless phantoms (“tenuis sine corpore vitas”, 6.292), whereas in Pullman they can physically attack the children and, when one of them (accidentally) tears a clump of hair out of Lyra’s scalp with her claw, she draws blood (Pullman 2000, 307). Thus, here they are a physical threat as well as a psychological one. That they are physical beings, however, later makes it possible for one of them to save Lyra from a fall, which shows their conversion to helpful beings.

Physical Appearance of Pullman’s Harpies and the Ancient Erinyes

Once the children and the two Gallivespians have crossed through the doorway into the land of the dead (304), a single Harpy approaches, which allows the children a detailed look at her revolting appearance. She is described as follows:

A great bird the size of a vulture, with the face and the breasts of a woman. [...] her face was smooth and unwrinkled, but aged beyond even the age of witches:¹² she had seen thousands of years pass, and the cruelty and misery of all of them had formed the hateful expression on their features, [...] repulsive [...]. Her eye-sockets were clotted with filthy slime, and the redness of her lips was caked and crusted as if she had vomited ancient blood again and again. Her matted, filthy black hair hung down to her shoulders; her jagged claws gripped the stone fierce-

¹¹ Therefore, Oram’s statement is incorrect when he writes that “classical writers do not associate them with the underworld” (2012, 426).

¹² This combination of old and young recalls the ambiguity of how Aeschylus’ Erinyes were presented on stage, as young (yet frightening) or old females, cf. Revermann (2008, 243–244).

ly; her powerful dark wings were folded along her back, [...] a drift of putrescent stink wafted from her every time she moved. (Pullman 2000, 304)

Also “her hair stood out from her head like a crest of serpents” (306). Like Aeschylus’ Erinyes, Pullman’s Harpies are relentless and undefeatable by physical force (ibid.).

The Erinyes are frequently mentioned throughout Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*. In the *Agamemnon*, the first part of the trilogy, they are only talked about (59, 463, 645, 748, 991, 1119, 1190, 1433, 1580). At the end of the *Libation Bearers*, after Orestes has killed his mother and the chorus has praised him for liberating Argos, the Erinyes appear to Orestes, but they are visible only to him. He cries out in terror, describing them as “hideous women, looking like Gorgons clad in dark-grey tunics and thickly wreathed with serpents” (*Libation Bearers* 1048–1050),¹³ his “mother’s wrathful hounds” (1054), and that “they are dripping a loathsome fluid [or blood – B. P.]¹⁴ from their eyes” (*Libation Bearers* 1058; cf. Sommerstein 2008, 348–349). In the *Eumenides*, finally, the Erinyes become the visible, very involved chorus of the play, acting as Orestes’ prosecutors. In this way, Aeschylus uses the Erinyes to visualize “the process of bringing hidden fearful things into the light of consciousness”, as Helen H. Bacon remarks (2001, 57). At the beginning of the play, the Pythia describes the three¹⁵ sleeping Erinyes in similar words to Orestes:

In front of this man there is an extraordinary band of women, asleep, sitting on chairs – no, I won’t call them women, but Gorgons; but then I can’t liken their form to that of Gorgons either. I did once see before now, in a painting, female creatures robbing Phineus of his dinner; these ones, though, it is plain to see, don’t have wings, and they are black and utterly nauseating. They are pumping out snores that one doesn’t dare come near, and dripping a loathsome drip from their eyes. And their attire is one that it’s not proper to bring either before the images of the gods or under the roofs of men. (*Eumenides* 46–56)

¹³ All the quotes from *Oresteia* are translated by Alan H. Sommerstein in Aeschylus (2008).

¹⁴ In another version of the text – 1058 στάζουσι νᾶμα Burges: στάζουσιν αἶμα M, cf. Garvie (1986, 46).

¹⁵ Line 140 shows that there are probably three Erinyes present, definitely not fewer, probably no more. This is the number that will become canonical, as seen at Euripides, *Orestes* 408 and 1650. Should the number already have been canonical in Aeschylus’ time, the entire chorus of Erinyes, which will soon appear on stage, would have been a surprise for the audience (Sommerstein 2008, 362, n. 22). In Pullman’s *Amber Spyglass*, there are one hundred and one Harpies (2000, 306), but only one (No-Name) directly interacts with the children. The novel is not confined by the restrictions of a theatrical space, so it can show a much larger number of characters.

The Pythia apparently finds it hard to describe the Erinyes. The comparison to Gorgons echoes Orestes' description in *The Libation Bearers* (1048–1050) and is made because of their frightening faces and snake-hair. The reference to Phineus points to the Harpies, as mentioned above. “Black” would denote both their dark faces and their black clothes (cf. Euripides, *Electra* 1345 and *Orestes* 321 and 408), i.e. mourning attire, which one would not wear in a temple, especially not one of Apollo (Sommerstein 2008, 361, ns. 19 and 21). The reason why people would not want to come close to their snore could refer to the terrifying sound, their smell, or both (ibid., n. 20).

Aeschylus focuses on certain aspects of their appearance and character, especially their vengefulness and mercilessness. As his editor and commentator, Alan H. Sommerstein, remarks:

[...] avengers of murder, perjury and other grave wrongs, who might exact their vengeance from the wrongdoer himself or from his descendants [...], guardians of δίκη in the broadest sense, in the natural as well as the social universe. They could be thought of as the embodiment of a curse; they could be thought of as the causers of that ruinous mental blindness called ἄρη. (1989, 9)

They especially were on the side of the elderly, in particular parents treated badly by their children. When we hear about their appearance elsewhere (e.g., Virgil, *Aeneid* 12.846–848; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 454, 475, 492–498), they are associated with serpents. Despite their horrific ways, it is assumed that they are necessary to maintain an ordered society (cf. specifically *Eumenides* 490–565).

Aeschylus, for thematic and dramatic reasons, restricts the Erinyes' area of interest to punishing family murders. They also represent the side of females and the importance of blood ties in the *Eumenides*. According to Pausanias (1.28.6), Aeschylus made the Erinyes look physically much more revolting than earlier sources; in particular, he added the snakes in their hair.¹⁶

It is striking that Pullman (2000, 304) takes up the detail of the dripping eyes from the *Eumenides*. Aeschylus' text is uncertain here. Are the eyes dripping with blood: στάζουσιν αἷμα as ms. [manuscript] M writes, or, more generally, with a fluid: στάζουσι νῆμα as George Burges emendates (in Garvie's edition, 1986, see n. 14 above)? There is no specific reason why the Erinyes' eyes should be dripping blood here, but ms. M's reading works well, as bloodshot eyes are associated with madness (cf. *Agamemnon* 1428; Euripides, *Heracles* 933). This image closely links the Erinyes with Clytaemnestra as a murderess whose bloodshot eyes are specifically mentioned after she has killed Agamemnon

¹⁶ Their gruesome appearance allegedly even made pregnant women in the audience suffer miscarriages, according to an anecdote preserved in the *Vita Aeschyli* 1.30–32, cf. Pollux 4.110 (cf. Revermann 2008, 244).

(*Agamemnon* 1428).¹⁷ The idea that a murderer’s deed is reflected in the blood in their eyes is, elsewhere in tragedy, associated with the avengers of murder (cf. Euripides, *Orestes* 256, and *Andromache* 978, and Garvie 1986, 347–348, ad *Libation Bearers* 1057–1058). Aeschylus goes one step further and actually has blood dripping out of the eyes, a striking image which emphasizes their frightening appearance.

Seeing the Worst in Everyone

The eyes are important, for the Erinyes and Harpies are able to see into everyone and discern the worst things they have ever done.¹⁸ Lyra’s friend Roger, who now is a ghost in the Underworld, reports:

[...] this is a terrible place, Lyra, it’s hopeless, there’s no change when you’re dead, and them bird-things... You know what they do? They wait till you’re resting – you can’t never sleep properly, you just sort of doze – and they come up quiet beside you and they whisper all the bad things you ever did when you was alive, so you can’t forget ‘em. They know all the worst things about you. They know how to make you feel horrible, just thinking of all the stupid things and bad things you ever did. And all the greedy and unkind thoughts you ever had, they know ‘em all, and they shame you up and they make you feel sick with yourself... But you can’t get away from ‘em. (Pullman 2000, 323)

The Harpies themselves explain how they gained this position:

Thousands of years ago, when the first ghosts came down here, the Authority gave us the power to see the worst in everyone, and we have fed on the worst ever since, till our blood is rank with it and our very hearts are sickened.

But still, it was all we had to feed on. It was all we had. (331)

Note that the Harpies in *The Amber Spyglass* feel nourished by the terrible things they see in the ghosts. In classical myth and literature Harpies defile food. In Pullman, they “defile emotional food – one’s sense of personal worth and the

¹⁷ See Rabinowitz (1981, 179) on the depiction of Aeschylus’ Clytaemnestra as an Erinyes.

¹⁸ Lyra’s separation from her daemon is particularly painful because she is able to see him, reminding one of the myth of Orpheus. In the Underworld, shapes lose their clearly definable edges (Pullman 2000, 264) and the colours fade. Pullman here moves away from black-and-white images, such as Heaven and Hell, challenging tradition (cf. Leet 2005; cf. also Greenwell 2010, 112). Salmakia (one of the Gallivespian spies in *The Amber Spyglass*) explains that this fading is caused by the ghosts’ fading consciousness after death. Wood (2001, 248) moreover rightly notes the association of eyes and knowledge.

value of one's experience" (Oram 2012, 427). They "do the work of an over-scrupulous conscience" (ibid.), but this gives the Harpies some sense of fulfilment, even though their "hearts are sickened" (Pullman 2000, 331).

Aeschylus' Erinyes, in contrast, feel outraged by the horrible things they see (cf. *Eumenides* 174–177 and 622–624). They do not need any special insight into Orestes' character, as the mere fact that he has killed his mother – no matter what his motivations were or that he acted on divine orders – demands that the Erinyes torment him. They follow him from Delphi to Athens where Athena takes pity on him. She leads a special court hearing, with Orestes claiming his innocence, arguing that he was instructed by the god Apollo to kill his mother to avenge his father Agamemnon, and the Erinyes demanding that he be punished for matricide with no excuses permitted. The jury is unable to reach a verdict, so Athena casts the deciding vote for Orestes' acquittal (*Eumenides* 752–753). The enraged Erinyes threaten to take vengeance on Athens, but eventually are persuaded by Athena to change and become kindly beings who are honoured by the Athenians.

Lyra also engages with the Harpies, concentrating on the main one. The polite way in which she asks the Harpy, "Lady, what's your name?" (Pullman 2000, 306), recalls the respectful way in which Athena speaks to the Erinyes in *Eumenides*. For example, at *Eumenides* 825, she calls them "goddesses" (cf. also Podlecki 1989, 185, ad *Eumenides* 825) and, at *Eumenides* 882–884, she says, "[S]o that you may never say that you, an ancient goddess [θεὸς παλαιὰ, 883], are wandering in dishonour [ἄτιμος, 884], banished from this land by me, young as I am [νεωτέρως ἐμοῦ, 882]", stressing her respect for the older age of the Erinyes. Compare also *Eumenides* 848–850 where Athena apologizes for giving advice to the Erinyes, even though they are older and therefore wiser. In the end, the Erinyes do listen to Athena's advice. Similarly, Pullman's Harpy is very interested in Lyra's offer to tell a story, but when she notices that she is lying, she angrily flies at her, yelling "Liar", which sounds almost like the girl's name (Pullman 2000, 307–308).

When Lyra tells the true story of her life, the Harpies listen, "spellbound" (331), but they are angry about Will trying to cut an exit out of the Underworld and they make a threat:

[...] we shall hurt and defile and tear and rend every ghost that comes through, and we shall send them mad with fear and remorse and self-hatred. This is a wasteland now; we shall make it a hell! (332)

Food and Feasting

The reference to defiling is a clear allusion to the Harpies of ancient myth defiling food. It appears rather surprisingly here, as we have not heard of Pullman's Harpies physically defiling anything. It may be a metaphor referring to

psychological torture. The Harpies’ faces are “eager and hungry and suffused with the lust for misery” (ibid.), “hungry” being another food metaphor, reminding the reader of the stories which “feed” the ghosts (330) and also how the Harpies “feed” on seeing the worst in every person (331; see above). Moreover, it foreshadows the Harpies talking about being nourished by Lyra’s true account of her life: “Because it was nourishing. Because it was feeding us” (332).¹⁹

The topic of food and feasting, albeit in a perverted form, is also central to the myth underlying the story of the *Oresteia*, starting with Thyestes’ children being fed to their father, followed by Iphigenia being sacrificed “like a goat” (*Agamemnon* 232) and Agamemnon slaughtered like an ox in a sacrifice (*Agamemnon* 1126 and 1384–1387), followed by Cassandra. These examples show the connection of food with sacrifice. Orestes sacrifices his mother to the ghost of Agamemnon, after which the Erinyes see Orestes as their consecrated victim (*Eumenides* 304, also 325–327). They actually refer to him as food (βόσκημα 302, βόσκᾶν 266) and are keen to devour him alive (264–268, 305). These sacrificial ritual violations are symbolic for communal disruption (Bacon 2001, 49).²⁰ But sacrifice is also part of the victory celebrations when the Erinyes have been converted and are to be installed in their new home (*Eumenides* 1006 and 1037).

Telling the Truth

It is of particular importance that Lyra is telling the truth now, when through all of the trilogy so far she has been shown to fare so well by telling lies. “True” in the context of this work does not refer to verifiable fact, but to narrations containing experiences which the storytellers themselves have had. In retelling them, “the stories serve as creative indicators of a portion of reality” (Colás 2005, 47). Lyra is the ultimate storyteller, as is also reflected in her name: Lyra sounds both like “lyre” with its connections of lyric narration and like “liar”. Lying is Lyra’s fail-proof way to achieve her goals, until she learns a lesson from the Harpies during her *katabasis*.

True storytelling acquires a wider significance in *The Amber Spyglass*. When Mary²¹ is advised by one of the ghosts, exiting the Underworld, to “[t]ell them

¹⁹ Cf. also the mention of food in Mary’s story of Marzipan which serves as the catalyst to Lyra’s “Fall”, as well as in the scene of the “Fall” itself, which, in obvious allusion to Adam and Eve, includes consuming small red fruit (Pullman 2000, 467–469 and 491–492).

²⁰ The idea of food is also possibly included in the corrupt line 523, about nourishing one’s heart with (beneficial) fear.

²¹ Mary is a former nun turned scientist from Will’s world and one of the wisest characters in the novel, as well as one of Lyra’s mother figures. She is at this point

stories [...]. You must tell them true stories” (Pullman 2000, 455), she misinterprets “them” to refer to Lyra and Will. When she tells them about her romantic encounter which made her give up being a nun, she does not do so in her role as the “snake”, which is mentioned in a prophecy about Lyra as the “second Eve”, i.e. to tempt Lyra and Will, but because the story fits the questions they have asked her about being a nun. Hence it is a true story, in the sense that it is Mary’s retelling of her own life experience (cf. Colás 2005, 60–61). That Mary tells them this story is crucial for the development of Pullman’s story, since it is the catalyst for Lyra’s prophesied “Fall” as the second Eve and the end of the Church.²² Mary’s rejection of monastic life signals that she prefers to focus on enjoying life on earth, rather than hoping for rewards after death, which also is a lesson that Lyra learns from the Harpies and one of the central messages of Pullman’s novel.

When the Harpies hear Lyra’s gripping true story, they realize that listening to true life experiences, i.e. those which involve the living body, nourishes them. These stories give them much more to feed on than memories of bad deeds. They notice that they have been taken in by the lies of the Church, which has used them to control people by fear, even ghosts after death. As Zsofi Anna Koller notes, “lies for power [...] construct the walls of suffering in Pullman’s land of the dead”, but truth can create openings for liberation (2004, 105 and 110; cf. also Oram 2012, 430). This is also expressed in the Bible quotation which Pullman chose to precede this very chapter (Pullman 2000, 321, ch. 23): “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

The Bargain

Tialys, on behalf of Lyra, makes a bargain with the Harpies. They will have the right to hear the true life story of each dead person before they let them leave. The Harpies, however, decide that it is not enough. They still need a task, a place, and honour. The Harpies’ speaker, No-Name, explains:

We had a *task* under the old dispensation. We had a place and a duty. We fulfilled the Authority’s commands diligently, and for that we were honoured. Hated and feared, but honoured too. What will happen to our honour now? Why should the ghosts take any notice of us, if they can simply walk out into the world again? We

living with the Mulefa in the same parallel world into which the ghosts exit from the Underworld.

²² Pullman here seems to play with different interpretations of the biblical Mary. In some Christian interpretations, going back to the Church Fathers, Mary is seen as “the second Eve” who – as opposed to the first Eve – resists temptation and sin. In Pullman, the character called Mary is assigned the role of the snake and Lyra is called “second Eve”, however, the results of Lyra’s temptation are positive for humankind.

have our pride, and you should not let that be dispensed with. We need an honourable place! We need a duty and a task to do, that will bring us the respect we deserve! (Pullman 2000, 333; emphasis in the original)

This speech is very similar to the Erinyes’ worries in *Eumenides*. After Orestes has been acquitted and both he and Apollo have left the stage, the chorus is alone with Athena. The Erinyes complain about their treatment:

ἐγὼ δ’ ἄτιμος ἅ τάλαινα, βαρύκοτος,
ἐν γὰρ τᾷδε, φεῦ,
ἰὸν ἰὸν ἀντιπενθῆ
μεθεῖσα καρδίας, σταλαγμὸν χθονὶ
ἄφορον· (*Eumenides* 780–784 = 810–814²³)

And I, wretched that I am, am dishonoured, grievously angry,
releasing poison, poison,
from my heart to cause grief in revenge
in this land – ah! –
a drip falling on the land such that it cannot bear!

The term ἄφορον can mean both ‘unendurable’ and ‘producing infertility’ (Sommerstein 2008, 453, n. 161). The Erinyes threaten to poison both the land and the people of Athens in revenge (as Apollo had already feared at *Eumenides* 729–730). They feel that they are the laughing-stock of the citizens of Athens and have been treated unbearably by them (789–790 and 819–820). They complain again about being dishonoured (ἀτίετον, 839 and 872) and that the trickery of the gods has sundered them from their age-old privileges and made them into nothing (845–846 and 879–880). Their earlier worries regarding their loss of honour seem to have come true (cf. 227 where they forbid Apollo to “try and cut down my privileges by [his] talk”). At *Eumenides* 892 they ask Athena where they shall live, at 894 they again ask about their honour and at 902 they ask about their task. These are the same concerns as Pullman’s Harpies have.

In both works, the transformation of the feared creatures does not take place by physical force but by persuasion. The Gallivespian’s tempting proposals together with the appeal of Lyra’s true life story lead the Harpies to agree to their new role as kindly Underworld guides after only a brief period of resistance. Both the Harpies and Erinyes are depicted acting as independent units. The Harpies have so far served the Authority of the Church because it offered them a place and a task, however unpleasant it may have been. When they are offered a more positive role with possibly even greater honours attached to it, they show no loyalty to the Church, but decide to accept their new task. Aeschylus’ Erinyes support Zeus “as guardians and enforcers of those laws that are an essential part of the cosmic order” (Bacon 2001, 50). However, in Orestes’ trial they do not

²³ The lines 780–784 have exactly the same wording as the lines 810–814.

take Zeus' side. That said, unlike Pullman's Harpies, the Erinyes are part of a group of formerly powerful, but now subdued divinities, the chthonic gods, i.e. the conflict between uranic and chthonic strongly influences their outlook, as well as the opposition of male and female, a theme which runs through the entire *Oresteia*. Agamemnon was commanded by the male god Zeus – an order opposed by the goddess Artemis (*Agamemnon* 134–138)²⁴ – to kill his daughter in order to be able to launch the male military campaign to Troy to avenge his brother. Clytaemnestra then murders her husband to avenge her daughter. Orestes is ordered by the male god Apollo to kill his mother, and he is then pursued by the female Erinyes and defended by Apollo himself in a trial which centres around the question of whether the mother or the father is the real parent of a child (cf. also Goldhill 2004, 38).

The Erinyes are somewhat harder to persuade than the Harpies, as they feel dishonoured by the more powerful but younger Olympian gods (cf., e.g., *Eumenides* 845–846) represented by Apollo, Orestes' defender. Athena is the only one who can bridge these gaps, having both male and female traits.²⁵ Athena is also visually linked to the Erinyes through her aegis showing a Gorgon's head which she wears in depictions in art and also apparently in this play (*Eumenides* 404; cf. also Rynearson 2013, 16–17). The Erinyes were compared to Gorgons by Orestes (*Libation Bearers* 1048) and the Priestess of Delphi (*Eumenides* 48). Athena is a strong, persuasive, fierce female who possesses many traits associated with ancient Greek males. Also Clytaemnestra's strength of character displays qualities typically associated with males; and Athena's similarities to Clytaemnestra have been pointed out by critics.²⁶ Athena's fierceness, strength of character, determination, intelligence, craftiness, eloquence, and persuasiveness are furthermore strongly mirrored in Lyra's character, the differences being that Lyra is mortal (a fact that is emphasized when she meets her own death) as well as her young age, inexperience, impulsive behaviour, and less rational, more emotional way of approaching problems. However, the similarities are obvious and it is striking how both these strong female characters (Athena and Lyra) manage, through their powers of persuasion and by offering a task and honour to the Harpies and Erinyes, to convert them into benign powers and fundamentally change the worlds Lyra and Athena live in. The two characters are also alike in that, instead of choosing to side with one of the two opposing forces, they both go an alternative way.

²⁴ For a discussion of the problematic interpretation of the portent of the fall of Troy and Artemis' anger in this passage see Lawrence (1976, 97–110).

²⁵ Cf. Mitchell-Boyask (2009, 32–33), for a discussion of the Olympian goddess Athena's similarities to the Erinyes and Goldhill (2004, 39) on her male and female characteristics. See also Rynearson (2013, 17–18), who quotes Zeitlin (1996, 103) on the topic.

²⁶ Cf. Goldhill (2004, 41), who refers to Winnington-Ingram (1983).

The powers of persuasion of both these strong females are pivotal for the turning points in their stories. Lyra, through her persuasion of the Harpies and freeing of the ghosts, deals a fatal blow to the Church. In the *Eumenides*, it is not the trial itself, but rather Athena’s persuasion of the Erinyes, which brings the tragic trilogy to its positive conclusion. Her persuasion has been called “the only weapon that can justify the Olympian victory and make it permanent” (Rabinowitz 1981, 181). Athena even begins her speech to the Erinyes with the words “Let me persuade you” (ἐμοὶ πίθεσθε, *Eumenides* 794). Thus, Athena transforms the tragic trilogy’s earlier, negative uses of persuasion into a positive power.²⁷ In the *Agamemnon* and *Libation Bearers*, the plot of revenge progresses through persuasion (cf. *Agamemnon* 205–217 and 905–957; *Libation Bearers* 899–903), but in the *Eumenides* it is persuasion which brings about reconciliation (cf. also Goldhill 2004, 54).

It takes Athena several attempts to persuade the Erinyes to change their ways (*Eumenides* 794–915), using rational arguments, bribes, and even a hint of a threat (826–828), as well as phrasing her offer more specifically in each of her appeals. She offers them a new home, close to her own temple, below the Acropolis, the “most ‘national’ of Athens’ shrines” (Sommerstein 2008, 460, n. 168; Conacher 1987, 171; *Eumenides* 833, 854–855, 916, 1022–1026),²⁸ increased honour in the cult of the Semnai (804–807, 834–836, 856–857, especially processions, see verse 856; and sacrifices, see verse 1037), and the role of judges and punishers of wrongdoing. It has been noted that Athena’s persuasive language contains notable elements of amatory persuasion, particularly in the expressions μείλιγμα and θελκτήριον (‘charm’ and ‘enchantment’, 886; cf. also the Erinyes’ answer at 900) and earlier, when Athena portrayed the Erinyes as excluded lovers (ἐρασθήσεσθε, 852; cf. Rynearson 2013, 4–5, 11–13, also 14–15).²⁹ This is echoed in the praise and kisses which the main Harpy receives from Lyra after saving her from falling into an abyss, while trying to find the best place to cut the opening out of the Underworld (see below).

The Harpies’ new task will be to guide the ghosts of the dead to the opening, in exchange for true stories. It is stressed that only the Harpies as “the guardians and the keepers” of the Underworld are able to do this task (Pullman 2000, 334),

²⁷ Cf. Rabinowitz (1981, 183); Sommerstein (1989, 255, ad *Eumenides* 885); Podlecki (1989, 187, ad *Eumenides* 885); Buxton (1982, 104–109); and Rosenmeyer (1982, 350–351).

²⁸ Cf. also Sommerstein (1989, 255, ad *Eumenides* 855) who points out that Aeschylus seems to envisage their shrine as being directly below the Acropolis, i.e. as close as possible to Athena, even though the actual sanctuary of the Semnai was closer to the Areopagus than the Acropolis.

²⁹ Rynearson notes the threat inherent in Athena’s portrayal of the Erinyes as excluded lovers, too. On the amatory language used here, cf. Buxton (1982, 111) and Rynearson (2013, 11–15).

thus they will keep the Underworld as their place to live. The fact that it is not a new place nor close to a politically and religiously important place, is different from the Erinyes moving under the Acropolis, but both of these places are underground.

Changing into Kindly Ones

In both works these foul creatures are persuaded to change their ways and become kind and helpful beings instead. In the *Oresteia*, the Erinyes develop from angry embodiments of revenge into the “civilizing force of the protector of order” (Mitchell-Boyask, 2009, 26; cf. also Sommerstein 1989, 10, n. 37). The Erinyes’ positive future role is based on the idea of beneficial fear. This is distinct from the paralyzing fear they used to instil in their victims, such as Orestes, and said to be necessary for a just society (*Eumenides* 517–525, 690–703, and also *Agamemnon* 13–15; cf. Bacon 2001, 56; cf. also Sommerstein 1989, 176, ad *Eumenides* 520–521). Both the transformed Erinyes and Harpies are no longer ‘unappeasable’ (δυσπαρήγοροι, 384), but open to propitiation through sacrifices or, in the case of Pullman’s Harpies, through true stories. Their transformation is not a total one,³⁰ something that becomes visually apparent because, even though the Erinyes receive new robes (*Eumenides* 1028–1029),³¹ it is stressed that their faces are still frightening (990) and avenging wrongs remains their duty (928–937, 954–955). Both retain the capability to judge and punish – the Erinyes wrongdoing, the Harpies lying or people who do not have stories to tell them because they have not lived life to the fullest. However, the Harpies will no longer judge the dead by their sins.

New Names

Their transformation is strikingly shown in their new names. In Aeschylus, all the Erinyes are renamed as a group,³² but in Pullman only one Harpy. It is likely that the Erinyes were renamed by Athena in a lacuna after verse 1027. According to the play’s hypothesis and Harpocraton, s.v. Εὐμενίδες (Suda ε3581), Athena suggested that they should now be called the Eumenides. This, however, is probably incorrect as the goddesses below the Acropolis were seemingly not

³⁰ Cf. Rynearson (2013, 6, n. 5) for further, supportive scholarly opinions on the matter.

³¹ These purple robes are a foil to the ones which Clytaemnestra laid down for Agamemnon, which were a sign of his impending bloody death.

³² In Aeschylus no individual Erinys is given a name, but at Sophocles (fr. 743 TrGF) one seems to be called Teiso (Teisiphone), cf. Sommerstein (2008, 362, n. 22). This is a fitting name, τείσω being the future form of τίνω – ‘take revenge’ (LSJ, s.v. τίνω II.3). Cf. Aeschylus, *Libation Bearers* 310 and 313 where the chorus uses this verb when they sing of blood revenge.

named the Eumenides until approximately 410 BC (cf. Sommerstein 1989, 12). The cult which Athena is shown to establish for the Erinyes in the tragedy would have been known to the spectators as that of the Semnai, which is what they are called at 1041. It is unlikely that here, at the very conclusion of the play, they were suddenly and unexpectedly named Semnai (meaning ‘august’, ‘revered’, ‘holy’), so it has been convincingly proposed that in the earlier lacuna this name was used (cf. Sommerstein 1989, ad *Eumenides* 1027).

In *The Amber Spyglass* the renaming of the main Harpy is foregrounded and important, as it is the only thing that outwardly changes when the Harpies take on their new role. Just before Lyra offers the Harpies to tell them a story, she finds out that the main Harpy’s name is No-Name (Pullman 2000, 306–307). After the Harpies’ conversion and No-Name’s rescue of Lyra from falling into an abyss,³³ the girl embraces and kisses the Harpy, the ghosts bless her, and Tialys and Salmakia praise her, “calling her the saviour of them all, generous one, blessing her *kindness*” (379, my emphasis). Their transformation into kind beings strongly echoes the idea of the Erinyes’ conversion in Aeschylus and the title of the play *Eumenides – The Kindly Ones*. Lyra thanks No-Name by giving her a proper name: “Gracious Wings”. It was the Harpy’s wings which enabled her to fly after Lyra and save the girl from falling into the abyss. “Gracious” foregrounds her kindness, making it sound almost as if the Harpy had an elevated or even divine status (OED, *s.v.*, 2c and 4). It also echoes the clumsy wings mentioned earlier in the passage (Pullman 2000, 314: “Her wings beat clumsily, and she only just made the turn”), hinting at an outwardly change of the Harpy’s movement after her conversion to a helpful being and also, possibly, that there has always been a hidden positive side to the Harpies. This idea is prepared when the children notice that the Harpies only fly and scream at them, they do not actually touch them. They realize that when one of the Harpies ripped a clump of hair out of Lyra’s head (307), this was not done on purpose (314).

Cosmic Changes

Both conversions generate cosmic changes. The triumph of the Olympian gods and rationality over the chthonic gods and the system of blood-revenge, which the Erinyes embodied, leads to the installation of just courts of law, in which persuasion and justice prevail. With fear of punishment after death abandoned, the oppressive Church of Lyra’s world loses its power. In this way, Will and Lyra’s achievement in the Underworld turns out to be even more important in defeating the Church than the physical battle between both sides which rages

³³ This abyss “creates a vacuum for Dust, which gives consciousness to the world”, and so is symbolic of the Church’s attempt to gain power in Lyra’s world (Koller 2004, 80).

above ground while the children are in the land of the dead, and in which the children, when they leave the Underworld, play no central part.

Conclusion

In *The Amber Spyglass*, Pullman places aspects of Aeschylus' *Eumenides* in a new and provoking context, employing the Harpies, with their strong resemblance of Aeschylus' Erinyes, as catalysts for Lyra's ethical development as well as to advance the story of the downfall of the Church further towards its conclusion. Pullman uses the image of the Underworld to show the emptiness of power and he uses the Harpies, based on the Erinyes, to symbolize the possibility of freedom through determination, kindness, truth, and living life to the fullest.³⁴ As he remarks through the words of Will's father, "We have to build the republic of heaven where we are, because for us there is no elsewhere" (Pullman 2000, 382, also 548). Moreover, both authors use these groups of frightening beings to depict the ultimate "other", playing with their readers' or theatre audiences' ancestral fears by painting a portrait of utterly frightful and revolting creatures, only to prove that it is possible to convert it into a picture of kindness and helpfulness, if persuasion and truth are used instead of violence and if a fair bargain is proposed. The "other" can be integrated (to a certain extent) into the human community and they can even benefit each other. A difference between both texts, caused by the historical context in which these works were created and the societies for which they are written, is that Aeschylus advocates beneficial fear as the foundation of a just society, whereas Pullman's message is to enjoy life here and now, without any fear of punishment (in this case after death). Here Pullman updates ancient values to fit his contemporary context.

As we have seen, there are parallels in the roles of characters in both works. I have in some detail discussed the similarities and differences of the ancient Erinyes and Pullman's Harpies, who, with a promise of new tasks and increased honour, are persuaded to change into kindly beings. Athena and Lyra have similar qualities and both use persuasion to change the worlds in which they live. One could possibly also vaguely see Will mirroring Orestes, as it is he who is mostly tortured by the Harpies, also about his mother, and he, too, is wanted for murder, also against his will, though of a male stranger and by accident. The Gallivespians slightly resemble Apollo insofar as they defend and speak on behalf of the children, but with the great difference that they help to come to an agreement with the Harpies, whereas Apollo alienates and infuriates the Erinyes and leaves before Athena makes her appeals to them.

The Harpies teach Lyra about "the necessity of evolving a *true* and creative imagination, as distinct from a fanciful one" (Lenz and Scott 2005, 7, emphasis in the original). In this way, Pullman employs the Harpies to comment and

³⁴ On the Underworld and falseness of power see Koller (2004, 83 and 100).

reflect on the process of storytelling itself. Lyra learns that “the richness of her real life is greater than any she can imagine, and that truth is more compelling than lies” (Frost 2006, 275). *His Dark Materials*, as a coming-of-age story, thus uses the Harpies as a catalyst for Lyra’s maturation and character development. She learns about the power of truth, which is more persuasive than lies, and the triumph of persuasion over physical force. Athena, the goddess of wisdom and rationality, also demonstrates this in Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*.

A story can only persuade if it contains enough truth, as Lyra learns. Pullman is known for his view that fantasy authors need to keep this in mind in order to create believable characters. To achieve this, Pullman insists on a psychological connection of fantasy and real life (Pullman 2002) – an example being Lyra, who lives in a fantasy world but whose psychology is very much based in our reality. Phrased differently, to quote Susan Cooper, “in ‘realistic’ fiction, the escape and encouragement come from a sense of parallel: from finding a true and recognizable portrait of real life” (1981, 14–15; cf. also Hunt 2005, 165; Oram 2012, 429–430). Pullman flags this message by employing the quote by Byron, preceding chapter 21, which is entitled *The Harpies*: “I hate things all fiction... there should always be some foundation of fact...”³⁵

The act of storytelling is a central topic of *His Dark Materials*. “Pullman is writing self-reflexively about the power of storytelling, making narrative itself both the medium and subject of his work” (Squires 2006, 93). *His Dark Materials*, as Claire Squires observes, is “a story about stories: a meta-story” (ibid.). It is also a story inspired by stories. In the case of his depiction of the Underworld, Pullman, a master of metafiction, builds in and reworks stories from the *Aeneid* and *Odyssey*, and in particular Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* to depict Lyra’s *katabasis*, making his readers reflect on the creative process of storytelling itself. Storytelling here is strongly advocated not as escapism, but as a means to reinvent the world.

It is very fitting that it is mythological beasts who teach Lyra the lesson on the importance of truth and living one’s life to the full. Lyra, who is known for her independence, bordering on stubbornness, needs to be in the most vulnerable state, i.e. without her animal-daemon, and utterly frightened in order to take this lesson on board. Like the ancient authors, Pullman employs the Harpies in his story as the depiction of the ultimate “other”. They are so different from humans and so revolting that even Lyra, who usually stands out for her bravery, gets a terrible fright and takes them seriously. It is remarkable how Pullman uses a number of ancient stories involving the Underworld, the Erinyes, and Harpies, and weaves them effectively together in order to create his Harpies, the mythical beasts who are central to Lyra’s learning and the cosmic changes affecting all humanity, which are brought about by the protagonist’s maturation.

³⁵ The quote comes from Byron’s letter of April 2, 1817 from Venice (No. 641) to his editor John Murray (Byron 1904, 93).

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WERONIKA KOSTECKA and MACIEJ SKOWERA

Womanhood and/as Monstrosity:
A Cultural and Individual Biography of the “Beast”
in Anna Czerwińska-Rydel’s
Bałtycka syrena [The Baltic Siren]

As scholars point out, we are witnessing the rise of the biographical fiction in the field of children’s and young adults’ literature in Poland (see, e.g., Olszewska 2015; Czabanowska-Wróbel and Wądolny-Tatar 2016). However, in the majority of such books – as they are to be perceived to be based on facts and not on fantasy – there is a little to no place for classical mythical creatures, which are nonetheless widely present in other genres (see, e.g., Marciniak, Olechowska, Kłos, and Kucharski 2013). Having said this, at least one exception from the rule can be found. This is *Bałtycka syrena. Historia Konstancji Zierenberg* [The Baltic Siren: The Story of Constantia Zierenberg], a novel by Anna Czerwińska-Rydel (2014a), nominated for Book of the Year by the Polish Section of IBBY, the analysis of which is the subject of this chapter.

Introductory Remarks

Czerwińska-Rydel (born 1973 in Gdańsk), a Polish children’s writer, specializes in creating fictionalized biographies of distinguished men and women. Her work includes not only the most famous figures, but also ones who are perhaps less renowned but possibly worth knowing (Pajączkowski 2015, 175–176). According to Elżbieta Kruszyńska, a scholar in the field of children’s literature and education, her works are lively narratives, in which the language is not infantilized, yet the message of a particular book is adapted to the audience’s age and knowledge (2015, 153). Each of her stories presents the biographical material in a different manner: every time, the author has a unique idea for showing the life of the protagonist against the cultural background of a given era, in terms of the form and the content of the book. On this basis, she creates a one-of-a-kind micro-narrative (Wądolny-Tatar 2016, 106). In the case of *The Baltic Siren*, this idea is to intersperse the novel with references to many texts of culture depicting the sirens and the mermaids. What is more, Olaf Pajączkowski, a co-editor of a

volume dedicated to children's biographical fiction, observes that Czerwińska-Rydel generally "[...] devotes a lot of space for introducing her characters' fears, dreams, plans for the future, and thoughts" (2015, 176),¹ thereby creating stories of a more reflective nature rather than simple chains of dates and historical events. This harmonizes with the author's own words regarding her approach to making biographical fiction: "If I want to write a story about someone who lived years ago, [...] I must make friends with this person or, at least, get acquainted with him or her" (Czerwińska-Rydel 2015b, 20).

Among the most renowned works by Czerwińska-Rydel, a prominent place is occupied by the "Gdańsk [Danzig] Trilogy" – a series of novels illustrated by Agata Dudek, a famous artist of the youngest generation.² The volumes of this trilogy concern Jan Heweliusz [Johannes Hevelius], Daniel Fahrenheit, and Arthur Schopenhauer, respectively (Czerwińska-Rydel 2011a, 2011b, 2012). These biographical stories share a common feature: all of them are about famous male figures. *The Baltic Siren* is the second part of another "Gdańsk" series. The first book in the trilogy to which *The Baltic Siren* belongs depicts Elżbieta Heweliusz [Elisabeth Hevelius] (Czerwińska-Rydel 2014b), while the last one refers to Johanna Schopenhauer (Czerwińska-Rydel 2015a). This shift is particularly interesting in the context of Polish female biographies for children in general. Monika Graban-Pomirska, a scholar interested in both literature for the younger audience and feminist criticism, points out that the model of a strong, independent, emancipated, and outstanding woman was long hidden in this kind of fiction, "pressed into a corset" of imagined calmness and "subordination by nature" (2015, 95). In contemporary children's and young adults' biographical prose, however, the situation seems to be different. This type of juvenile literature in Poland can be characterized by, *inter alia*, a departure from the didactic, moralistic aspect of biographies of women, the appreciation for their achievements in various areas of life, and the idea of rewriting history from the female perspective (99).

The Baltic Siren is obviously a part of this change, but the book also discusses the older mode of writing children's stories about women's lives. The novel is a fictionalized biography of Konstancja Czirenberg [Constantia Zierenberg], an exceptional artist born in 1605 in Gdańsk on the Baltic Sea. She was the daughter of Mayor Jan Czirenberg [Johannes Zierenberg], an avid lover of culture and art himself, who ensured that his child received a comprehensive education. Katarzyna Grochowska, a specialist in history of music, writes that "[t]he biographical references to Johannes Czirenberg almost always include information about his daughter [...], but these references, even when taken together, are rather uninformative" (2002, [n.p.]). The scholar finds more details in

¹ In every case, citations from Polish texts are given in our own working translation.

² For an analysis of Agata Dudek's illustrations accompanying the "Gdańsk Trilogy", see Wincencjusz-Patyna (2016, 109–112).

two seventeenth-century sources: a page-long dedication from the Milanese publisher Filippo Lomazzo to Konstancja, preceding a motet anthology *Flores praestantissimorum virorum a Philippo Lomatio Bibliopola delibati* (1626), and a travel diary by Charles Ogier, a member of a French legation himself (Grochowska 2002, [n.p.]). Grochowska writes of Lomazzo, who probably never met the woman:

He compares her to a range of Greek figures and goddesses [...], yet he seldom provides solid biographical facts. We learn from the dedication that Czireberg was a nexus of all virtues [...], that she was gifted with a most learned hand [...], most skilful fingers [...] and with the throat of a nightingale [...]. (ibid.)

What is more, the publisher mentions that she “was also an accomplished organ player, and a proud owner of the organs installed in her house” (ibid.). Ogier, on the other hand, writes about Konstancja’s beautiful voice and dazzling appearance (ibid.). On the basis of his diary, Grochowska indicates that “[i]n addition to the excellent musical education which Czireberg undoubtedly received, she was not a bad painter, and she was fluent in six languages: German, Polish, French, Italian, Swedish, and Latin” (ibid.). All of this caused Konstancja to be shrouded in an aura of secrecy, strangeness, and otherness, especially in her own lifetime, and therefore she came to be called the “Baltic Siren”.³ After the death of her husband Zygmunt [Sigmund] Kerschenstein, as well as two daughters out of three children, Konstancja stopped singing. She died of the plague in 1653 (Czerwińska-Rydel 2014a, 92).

In this paper, we would like to discuss two issues which appear to be particularly interesting in Czerwińska-Rydel’s book. First of all, the image of the siren, as a literary ploy to mythologize the heroine’s biography, will be presented, with a particular focus on the author’s strategy of intertextuality. Next, we will examine the elements of cultural narratives about so-called “human monsters” as a tool to tell a story about a woman as the Other. We find these issues to be of a great significance. This is because they seem to deal with some of the most important, and sometimes intertwined, themes of both contemporary children’s and young adults’ books and poststructuralist thought: the ideas of retelling or re-writing history and well-known stories from a female perspective, and of redefining the concept of “humanity” – ideas which are often discussed in the context of classical mythology (Moula 2012).

³ See Grochowska (2002): “Czireberg must have possessed a truly extraordinary personality, since the Milanese publisher Lomazzo was not the only one to make a dedication to her. Indeed, Czireberg’s foremost admirer, Charles Ogier, not only mentions her frequently in his diary, but also dedicated a poem to her entitled *Sireni Balthicae Constantiae Sirenbergiae*. J. J. Moeresius, also a poet, composed a series of poems in Constantia’s honor”. See also Czerwińska-Rydel (2014a, 92).

Mythologizing Konstancja's Biography: The Image of the Siren and Czerwińska-Rydel's Strategy of Intertextuality

As we know, in Greek mythology the sirens were marine creatures, half woman and half bird. Leo Ruickbie, a scientist who specializes in the history of religion and magic, states that they were “[...] first mentioned in Homer’s *Odyssey*, [...] but undoubtedly based on an older oral tradition” (2016b, 184). According to Ovid (*Met.* 5.512–562; see Grimal 2008, 330), they were initially ordinary girls who were Persephone’s companions, but when Persephone was abducted by Pluto, Demeter gave the girls wings, so that they could search for her over the land and the sea. In other accounts and in Roman mythology, the siren was also depicted as a fish with the head of a woman, or as half woman and half fish, similar to the mermaids that appeared in the folklore of many regions of the world. What is more, the sirens and the mermaids were presented similarly in later medieval bestiaries. David Badke, a scholar who launched a database dedicated to animals in the Middle Ages, points out that:

Siren illustrations are varied, and can often be confused with the mermaid. Sirens are always female, and usually have wings. Some are depicted as having a fish body from the waist down; others have a bird body. Some illustrations show the uncertainty of whether sirens are part fish or part bird by giving them attributes of both [...]. (2011, [n.p.])

For example, the siren illustrated in the twelfth-century *Bestiaire* by an Anglo-Norman poet, Philippe de Thaon, “[...] has a fish tail and stands on bird’s feet” ([Badke] 2011). As Ruickbie writes, the “[c]iting of the creature [...] in works of natural history continued into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but the avian characteristics disappeared to be replaced by aquatic ones” (2016b, 186).

The specific trait of the sirens is their unparalleled musicality and, especially, their beautiful singing. Pseudo-Apollodorus (*Bibliotheca: Epitome* 7.18; see Grimal 2008, 330) presents an image of these creatures in which one of them is singing, the second one is playing a lyre, and the third one is playing a flute. According to the oldest myths, the sirens resided on one of the Mediterranean islands. They lured sailors with their music; when the sailors were engrossed by the sounds, they would allow their ships to sail too close to the coastline, so that they crashed on the shore, and the sirens would then devour their prey. Moreover, as Marina Warner puts it:

Some say they have “hungry”, even “starving” faces as they wait for their prey, but this may have passed from folklore about Harpies. They can no longer fly, however, because the Muses stole their pinions for their own crowns. But this must be a later legend, as on a famous Greek pot in the British Museum the sirens

appear plummeting and swimming around Odysseus' galley, like ospreys after fish [...]. (1994, 400)

The various mythological and literary references to the sirens constitute the material from which Czerwińska-Rydel weaves the biography of Konstancja Czi-zenberg. It should be stressed here that the Polish word *syrena* refers to two creatures: the siren and the mermaid. Thus, the Polish language does not differentiate between the winged creature from Greek mythology and, for instance, the protagonist of Hans Christian Andersen's well-known tale, *The Little Mermaid*. Also Czerwińska-Rydel's book in the materials of IBBY Poland is presented as *The Baltic Mermaid*. In the present chapter, the version *The Baltic Siren* was chosen, *inter alia*, because of its ancient connotations with music. However, this apparently problematic impossibility to make a linguistic distinction between the two fantastic creatures allowed the author in question to enrich her story with a greater literary context by referring to both the mythical half woman/half bird and the half woman/half fish. Czerwińska-Rydel purposefully plays upon the ambiguity of the Polish term *syrena* and builds her narrative from various literary allusions that suggest Konstancja's mysterious affiliation with the community of the sirens, the phenomenally beautiful creatures that were said to enchant strangers with their singing and to bring misfortune to those whom they love. These decisions created a mythologized biography that is full of intriguing implicit statements and associations, which intensifies the aura of otherness surrounding the main character, Konstancja, who has perhaps earned the title of the "Baltic Siren" not only because of her otherworldly voice and beauty, but also because of the events in her life.

As Graham Allen points out, "[...] intertextuality reminds us that all texts are potentially plural, reversible, open to the reader's own presuppositions, lacking in clear and defined boundaries, and always involved in the expression or repression of the dialogic 'voices' which exist within society" (2000, 209). Czerwińska-Rydel's literary strategy is based on constructing an intertextual narrative which has all of the above-mentioned features. The tale about the "Baltic Siren", both indirectly and directly, refers to numerous texts and becomes a text which is – as discussed by Roland Barthes in his classic concept – "[...] a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" (1977, 146). At the same time, it should be emphasized that, in this case, the literary narrative is accompanied by the visual one, created by Marta Ignerska, an award-winning Polish artist and the illustrator of the two other books in this "female trilogy". The first part of *The Baltic Siren* comprises only illustrations – intriguing, ambiguous, and difficult in their reception – drawn in one of Konstancja's favourite colours, red.⁴ Anita Wincencjusz-Patyna, an expert in picture books

⁴ See Wincencjusz-Patyna (2016, 112–113): "Ignerska [...] has applied one colour only for each of the three stories: yellow for Elisabeth, red for Constantia, and bright pink

and illustrations, writes that “[...] the repeating motif of the visual compositions is a multiplication of forms: a school of fish, a tangle of people’s arms, girls’ legs in synchronized swimming, sea waves, sandcastles, bones, teardrops, and many other” (2016, 113). Each centrefold illustration includes a quotation.⁵ Some of these come directly from the literary part of the book, while others come from the texts of several other authors who have written about the sirens in their works. Each quote is taken out of its original context, and the context is probably unknown to the potential reader, for none of the quoted sentences is attributed to its author. Since the source of the quoted words and their meaning are unknown, the reader can possibly experience an aura of mystery, created by the pieces of the literary narrative and the equally mysterious images. It is also worth mentioning that, as Wincencjusz-Patyna indicates, “Ignerska puts a lot of modern accessories into these historic stories. [...] The simplified figure of Konstancja and her plain, rather modern, dress also make her story timeless. The young woman who lived in the 17th century sings to a microphone, and plays the electric guitar” (113–114). Basing on this intertextual mosaic, which additionally refers to different time periods, the reader may try to guess the progression, logic, and meaning of the story that he or she will be told in the strictly literary part. Therefore, the first part constitutes a prelude to the second part, in which the other features of the tale are revealed.

In the actual story of the birth, life, and death of this unusual “Baltic Siren”, the phrases quoted in the first part (accompanying the illustrations) reappear. Because these have already acted on the reader’s consciousness, they will guide his or her reading and interpretation of the text, and will suggest mythological tropes. New intertexts will also appear, as each chapter is accompanied by a quote from one of the numerous works addressing the sirens. Czerwińska-Rydel refers to various texts, such as Homer’s *Odyssey*, Pliny’s *Natural History*,

for Johanna. The three energetic colours, for which Ignerska has a strong predilection, judging from her other book graphic layout concepts, are spread on black and white backgrounds, or they create the background for the most primary graphic contrast of black and white. [...] This narrow choice of colours also indicates the time of the story: day or night, and accentuates the most important or symbolic events. For instance, Constantia’s mother’s labour, or even the gossip wheeling around the mysterious birth, are depicted by a plain red surface and a small speech bubble in the bottom right corner”.

⁵ See Wincencjusz-Patyna (2016, 114): “Ignerska has decided on a solution well known from a traditional approach to illustrations which accompanied novels, when a certain picture is underwritten by a line from the original text. It was often present in the 19th century editions and classical publications of fiction in the following decades of the next century as the illustrations used to be placed on inserts, in some cases far away from the depicted scene. As a result, in Ignerska’s designs we have a double page spread even more resembling a comic because the majority of the lines are placed in speech bubbles [...]”.

Christopher Columbus' writings, or Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*. However, what is important is that each quote does not appear until the end of a given chapter.

Such a ploy, firstly, gives the potential recipient the freedom to form their own interpretations; while reading a chapter, the reader, having the phrases and suggestions from the first part of the book in mind, is supposed to reconstruct the meaning of each element of the biography and decipher the identified allusions on his or her own. Secondly, the quotation closing a chapter constitutes what can be referred to as a particular intertextual flashback, and this may stimulate the reader to reflect upon their previous interpretation and, at the same time, still leaves an opportunity for him or her to develop personal associations and hypotheses. For example, a quotation from Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*, "they had beautiful voices – more beautiful than any human being" (2016, 391), closes the chapter that describes the impression which young Konstancja's performance made on the regulars at the salons of Gdańsk. As Christine Wilkie-Stibbs puts it in her study "Intertextuality and the Child Reader":

[...] the theory of intertextuality is dynamic and dialogic, located in theories of writing, reader-response theory, the social production of meaning, and intersubjectivity (the "I" who is reading is a network of citations). It is also a theory of language because the reading subject, the text and the world are not only situated in language, they are also constructed by it. So, not only do we have a notion of all texts being intertextual, they become so because they are dialectically related to, and are themselves the products of, linguistic, cultural and literary codes and practices; and so too are readers, writers, illustrators and viewers. (2006, 170)

In a way, Czerwińska-Rydel creates a metafictional tale of intertextual relations between various texts of culture. In fact, every possible narrative is related to other narratives and, to a certain extent, influenced and conditioned by some other narratives. The literary biography of Konstancja Czirenbeg discussed here is not the only one that refers to variety of myths and tales, for rumours that had been circulating since Konstancja appeared to be an exceptionally talented girl were an intertextual narrative of this kind as well. Such a poststructuralist concept of global intertextuality seems to be of a particular importance with respect to texts written for children's audience. As Wilkie-Stibbs indicates:

The theory of intertextuality of children's literature is a rich field in which to engage young people's awareness of the importance of the activity of making intertextual links in the interpretive process. It brings them to a gradual understanding of how they are being (and have been) textually constructed in and by this intertextual playground. (177)

Thus, the author of *The Baltic Siren* proves that all stories, including stories of people's lives, change their meaning depending on the teller, listener/reader, and historical-cultural context of telling and listening/reading.

Significantly, in reference to Czerwińska-Rydel's tale of Konstancja Czirenborg's life, three different perspectives on intertextuality could be considered. Firstly, *The Baltic Siren* exists and functions in the endless network of stories. Secondly, *The Baltic Siren* itself is such a network. And, thirdly, every intertext functioning in *The Baltic Siren* refers to other intertexts. For example, as Warner points out, "Andersen elaborated his disturbing story [...] from varied strands of oral and written tales in Eastern as well as Western tradition, about undines and selkies, nixies, Loreleis, and Mélusines, in which the fairy creature appears on earth and stays with a mortal as his bride only on certain conditions" (1994, 396). Moreover, Konstancja herself, as a literary heroine, appears to be a meaningful "text", a live myth constructed from various stories, various intertexts. Therefore, it could be argued that even the real Konstancja was a "construction". Initially, this "construction" was created by the society of seventeenth-century Gdańsk; today, it is created by Czerwińska-Rydel and readers of *The Baltic Siren*.

In Czerwińska-Rydel's work, the quoted phrases, every now and then, act to remind us that the life of Konstancja Czirenborg mysteriously reflects the existence of the mythological creatures, but the references also show the reversible nature of Czerwińska-Rydel's text itself. The tale of the "Baltic Siren" is woven from references to various recognizable culture-based texts; and at the same time, it constitutes a new literary creation. Therefore, the boundaries of the intertexts become blurred, as they are blended into this new tale. According to the statement from Laurent Jenny, "[i]ntertextuality speaks a language whose vocabulary is the sum of all existing texts" (1982, 45, quoted in Allen 2000, 114). However, in this case, the "sum of texts" creates an entirely new quality. It gives Konstancja's biography a unique meaning, while at the same time, the intertexts themselves gain new meanings. This phenomenon appears interesting especially when we consider the hypothetical skills of the child reader of *The Baltic Siren*. Wilkie-Stibbs argues that "[c]hildren's intertextual experience is peculiarly achronological, so the question about what sense children make of a given text when the intertextual experience cannot be assumed, is important" (2006, 171). Presumably, by reading the tale of Konstancja's life, a child will create his or her concept of the texts quoted – and thus of the siren as a mythological creature – *through* this particular tale. Therefore, on one hand, the story of the "Baltic Siren" is the mythologized biography, while on the other hand, it participates in creation of the myth of the siren.

Konstancja and “Human Monsters”: A Woman as the Other

Yet another of the afore-mentioned features of intertextuality is the clash between the dialogic social voices which exist within a given text. In the case of the tale by Czerwińska-Rydel, this can be explained in the following way: just as the author juxtaposes excerpts from various works, each person’s comments about Konstancja enter into a shared dialogue, and these comments refer both to positive and to pejorative associations with the mythological sirens. This is because such beings – both the ones with wings and the ones with fish tails – are supposed to be ambiguous and somehow monstrous creatures. They are beautiful and fascinating, but also dangerous and, sometimes, deadly. With their physical appearance and the said inclinations, the sirens seem to be beyond the anthropocentric idea of “normality”. In a way, they resemble so-called “human curiosities”, “oddities”, “beasts”, which appear in medieval and later sources from all over Europe, and even beyond, but the idea of which has its roots in Antiquity (Wieczorkiewicz 2009, 20–25). It is worth noting that some “human monsters” (both the “real” and the “fake” ones) were called “sirens” or “mermaids” – one can mention the famous FeeJee Mermaid, described by Ruickbie as “[a] supposed mermaid from Fiji, which was once exhibited by the indubitable P. T. Barnum [...]” (2016a, 131) in his American Museum. Interestingly, Bernard Duhamel, a specialist in paediatric surgery, even suggests that “[i]f the mermaid legend evokes more of mythology than of pathology, its origin very probably lies in ancient observations of certain types of human monstrosities. Human sirens are not as rare as is sometimes thought [...]” (1961, 152).

The figure of a “human monster” long served as a tool to interpret births of “peculiar” children within society (Wieczorkiewicz 2009, 11), the children that today would be probably considered the victims of various congenital disorders. “Human monsters” were thought to be, for instance, omens of God’s anger, the consequences of sin and magic, or even perceived as the offspring of supernatural beings.⁶ During the Age of Curiosity (Pomian 1990, 45–64), “human oddities” were sometimes collected and presented in encyclopaedic cabinets of curiosities, as they – just like the other elements of these collections according to the Polish historian Krzysztof Pomian (69–78) – were believed to represent the macrocosm. This tradition leads us to the nineteenth- and twentieth-century freak shows (Bogdan 1988; Durbach 2010; Garland-Thomson 1996), in which people with too many (and, sometimes, not enough) hands or legs, so-called “giants” and “dwarfs”, women with beards, and excessively hairy children were displayed for the delight of the crowd (Wieczorkiewicz 2009, 235). Anna Wieczorkiewicz, a researcher in the field of anthropology of the body, forms a hypothesis that such beings:

⁶ For the examples, the history, and the theory of the figure of a “human monster”, see, for instance, Bates (2005); Wieczorkiewicz (2009); Wright (2013).

[...] cannot be removed from the human world. Mastered and subdued, thrown out from the rational world as an aberration or a superstition, as a disease or fiction, they will return to us through the back door. Eventually, we will always see them – what is more, we will search for them, as their nature intrigues and attracts us. [...] It is like monsters would like to prove we need them for something, like they would tell us that, without them, we would be unable to determine our own nature and to understand the world we want to organize and explain. (2009, 6)

Czerwińska-Rydel cleverly exploits the sirens' resemblance to such "monsters", making the elements of cultural narratives about these individuals a tool with which she can spin Konstancja's story. Wiczorkiewicz indicates that so-called "human beasts" always trigger rumours about their origins:

A strange creature is born: a baby with two heads or without any limbs, or a one whose sex cannot be determined. Such a birth makes a gap in the order of life, it breaks certain norms – it evokes fear, stupefaction, curiosity, reflections on the nature of the world... How to explain it? [...] Why the baby was born at all? (11)

In *The Baltic Siren*, the protagonist's birth is a subject to ponder too, a problem that has to be interpreted, because it is shrouded in an aura of mystery, as Konstancja is born two months after her mother's first labour pains. Additionally, the woman, contrary to her husband, is pleasantly surprised when – after a nightmare in which a siren appears – she gives a birth to a girl instead of a boy (which she had expected before the dream, by basing on her physician's opinion). All of these become a subject of gossip. Some peddlers and women from the help think that the newborn is an abandoned child of a sailor and a siren, as these creatures were said to be seen on the sea – and one of them, according to the rumours, looked exactly like little Konstancja. The most talkative peddler even suggests that such hybrid children are not able to live neither in the sea nor on land, and bring misery to their protectors. Nevertheless, even in her infancy, the heroine is praised for her beauty, the temper, and the angelic voice: "We have to admit the girl is a miracle!" (Czerwińska-Rydel 2014a, 54) – says Klara, one of the Czirenbergs' servants. Therefore, the appreciation for Konstancja accompanies the anxiety resulting from her mysterious birth.

This is developed in the following parts of Czerwińska-Rydel's book. When the protagonist is an adolescent, and her talents begin to blossom, she becomes an attraction at social gatherings. But appreciation for her abilities is interwoven with recurring rumours about her "monster" identity. She is also exposed to prying eyes, as many "human oddities" were too. Wiczorkiewicz writes that "[t]he fear of a human monster can be mixed with excitement, but it is hard not to watch" (2009, 11). The issue of "watching" becomes particularly important when Konstancja puts on a heavy ball gown embroidered with jewels and lace. It is more of a disguise than just clothes, for the girl must look astonishing and

attract glances in order to find a future husband. She seems to be a carnivalesque attraction; not a human being, but rather a “creature”, or a curious gadget, just like the exoticized or aggrandized “human oddities” presented in freak shows (Bogdan 1988, 94–118). Additionally, a member of the help realizes that the girl with this dress on looks exactly like a siren. She is constantly being looked at, which corresponds with Wiczorkiewicz’s words on the births of “human oddities”. The scholar writes that such beings have “[...] some features of the miracle, and the miracle brings a spectacle to life [...]” (2009, 5), just like in the case of Czerwińska-Rydel’s heroine, who is being exposed to viewers during specific “spectacles”.

Siren-oriented rumours and comparisons return in the book again and again. They can be interpreted as referring not to Konstancja herself, but to the society in which she lives. Sometimes they are signs of admiration but, in other cases, of fear, jealousy, and morbid curiosity. The protagonist is aware of them, as she finds it hard to fit into the world and constantly asks herself: “Who am I?”. At the end of the story, the woman seems to believe that she is a siren, as she says on her deathbed: “There is no cure for it [the disease]. I go back where I came from” (Czerwińska-Rydel 2014a, 91). Or perhaps she is ironically ridiculing people’s beliefs? One may ask why Konstancja is constantly perceived as an “oddy”, as she seems to be just an ordinary, albeit multitalented woman. But herein lies the cause of all the gossip and comparisons: she is a woman and she is multitalented. In her contemporaries’ imagination, singing, painting, and any other fields of art were not associated with females. Konstancja’s father says that “[...] she is not a normal child” (58), and her music teacher agrees with him, calling her “a creature” (59), “a sea siren” (59), and “a wonder of wonders” (59), but not a girl or simply a person. According to the protagonist’s mother, Konstancja should not sing and paint, as girls ought to be raised to make humble, God-fearing wives and mothers. Mrs. Czireberg thinks that it is a feminine “nature” that makes women not act the same way men do. As we can see, the main character is the Other because she sings and paints beautifully, and because she is not a male.

In cultural narratives about “human monsters”, the source of the otherness was, *inter alia*, an excess of particular features (Wiczorkiewicz 2009, 11). Czerwińska-Rydel uses this element of such stories: Konstancja is characterized by an excess, too, but in this case it is an excess of skills. In fact, the protagonist’s questions about her own identity are also questions about the position of women in society. The girl cannot understand why she is not supposed to do the same things men do, but for her contemporaries, such a woman as Konstancja is a danger. She stands outside their gender-conditioned views on the world and, therefore, she should be marked as a “curiosity”. They let her perform, but it is only to remind others that this is a carnivalesque exception, not “normal” enough to be a legitimized part of everyday life.

Conclusion

All this considered, it could be argued that Konstancja's biography is a mythologized "herstory". Initiated in the 1970s, the concept of "herstory" has been rooted in feminist criticism. According to Barbara Yost:

The word "herstory" was coined to indicate a fresh approach to history that would encompass the lives of women as well as men. Though it was rejected as frivolous and unscholarly by some, others found it useful for emphasizing the need to tell history from female perspective. (2000, 1004)⁷

Referring to the first wave of feminism, Ivana Milojević indicates that:

Feminists critiqued women's exclusion from the public sphere and they critiqued women's exclusion from the dominant approach to history. They critiqued the interpretation of history in which men became recognised as "subjects" of history while woman was delegated to an ahistorical, biological sphere. This meant that each female was thus seen as a universal "woman", in terms of her ahistorical universal "nature" and in terms of her ahistorical universal role of a wife and a mother. Thus as poetically expressed by Adele Aldridge: "His story [became] History [and] My [women's] story [remained] Mystery". (2008, 336)

A detailed analysis of diverse ideas related to the notion of "herstory", as well as a description of critical voices referring to this notion (Morgan 1992), are not the subject of this chapter. Yet we apply this term as a key word to understand the very nature of Czerwińska-Rydel's work: we can call the mythologized biography of Konstancja "herstory" (as well as "mystery"), as it tells the story of the woman's life by revealing and deconstructing many of gender stereotypes, widely present in many older female biographies for children. Within her own society, the protagonist is considered strange, mysterious, and monstrous, because she is a woman, yet living and behaving in an untypical way.

However, we should add that Konstancja's "herstory" is a perplexing one. Interestingly, there are only a few direct statements made by the protagonist of *The Baltic Siren*. The reader may learn her thoughts ("Who am I?"), but usually Konstancja's voice is "hidden" in indirect speech and, even more often, the girl is talked about by other characters. Paradoxically, despite the fact that Konstancja

⁷ Interesting examples of "herstories" that refer to Greek mythology and works of Homer and Virgil are the following novels: *Homer's Daughter* by Robert Graves (1955), *The Penelopiad* by Margaret Atwood (2005), and *Lavinia* by Ursula K. Le Guin (2008). Graves and Atwood retell the *Odyssey*, the former relating the life of Nausicaä, a young woman from Western Sicily – the "true" author of the *Odyssey*, while the latter presents Penelope who reminisces on, among other things, the events described in Homer's work. Le Guin refers to Virgil's *Aeneid* and focuses on Lavinia, daughter of the king of the Latins of Laurentum.

has become famous for her exceptionally beautiful voice, in the narratological sense we cannot “hear” it. She does not talk about herself but, significantly, other people talk about her instead and, what is more, other people talk on her behalf. Therefore, this literary strategy applied by Czerwińska-Rydel leads to another intertextual association with Andersen’s *The Little Mermaid*. As we remember, the heroine of this tale loses her tongue in exchange for a human body and an existence in a human society, thus she becomes mute.⁸ In a way, the heroine of *The Baltic Siren* is mute as well; she is a mysterious “beast” living among people and, in a cultural sense, she lives in silence. As we can assume, the words of all songs she sings are someone else’s words. We can reconstruct her image by relying on other characters’ opinions and guesses revealed by the author. It is not accidentally that the visual narrative created, as we mentioned above, by Ignerska in the first part of the book begins with a significant quotation from the second (literary) part. The stallholder asks a person from Konstancja’s closest circle: “Were you present at the birth?” (Czerwińska-Rydel 2014a, 5). Thus, the story of the “Baltic Siren” begins with rumours. In this context, it is worth mentioning that, as Esther Fritsch indicates:

Over time [gossip] became associated with women’s speech, referring to women present at a birth and, starting in the nineteenth-century, to idle talk especially among women, acquiring a pejorative meaning in the process. The themes of gossip are mostly transgressions of social norms, making gossip a site where these norms are maintained and negotiated and participation in it becomes a sign of social membership. (2005, 207)

Gossip (probably spread, we can assume, mostly by women) accompanies Konstancja from the moment of her birth and becomes an important, integral part of her existence. Moreover, it is exactly gossip where the border between the protagonist’s “normality” and her “monstrosity” is maintained and negotiated. These rumours, these voices of the seventeenth-century society of Gdańsk as reconstructed by Czerwińska-Rydel, create the myth and the legend of Konstancja Czireberg’s life. As Carolyn G. Heilbrun puts it: “One cannot make up stories: one can only retell in new ways the stories one has already heard. Let us agree on this: that we live our lives through texts” (1990, 109, quoted in Tatar 1992, 230). We can relate this reflection to Czerwińska-Rydel who tells the story about the “Baltic Siren”, to the citizens of Gdańsk, and to Konstancja herself. They all live their lives through texts, that is, diverse texts of culture. That is exactly how Konstancja’s “herstory” has been created.

Significantly, the first time we hear Konstancja’s voice (in a form of a direct speech) in the literary part of the book is when she discusses with her father the paintings they saw in the town hall:

⁸ On other tales and myths including such a motif, see Warner (1994, 396–397).

Konstancja was fascinated by the town hall, paintings, and what her father had told her. She liked the serious way he treated her, as if she was almost an adult, and that he let her enter a place where only men meet, as women were not allowed to be in power.

‘Why, father?’ she asked when they were coming back home. ‘Can’t women be just, wise, godly, and steadfast? Aren’t they too able to strive for freedom and harmony? Aren’t they judicious enough to make important decisions?’ (Czerwińska-Rydel 2014a, 66)

As we can see, when Konstancja speaks for the first time, she does it as a mature, wise, and insightful woman. This bewilders her father, for the girl appears to be an emancipationist who is ahead of her time. In this she violates the social norms that persisted in the seventeenth century. When she dies, she loses her exceptional voice for ever, but in a way she had never had a voice. Would her contemporaries accept a woman who was not only an artist of many talents, but also an emancipationist who overturns patriarchal norms?

As we recall from the *Odyssey*, Odysseus, following Circe’s advice, ordered his companions to plug their ears with wax, and to tie him to his ship’s mast. In this way, Odysseus, who was curious to hear the siren’s voice, could listen to the alluring sounds yet not yield to them. Interestingly, as Warner points out:

The end the sirens bring is not identified as a fatal pleasure in Homer, though in Christian Europe has been read with these (sexual) overtones. The content of the song is knowledge, the threefold wisdom possessed by beings who are not subject to time: knowledge of the past, of the present, and of the future. Cicero stressed this, introducing the sirens into his argument that the human mind naturally thirst after knowledge. “It was the passion for learning,” he strives to persuade his audience, “that kept men rooted to sirens’ rocky shores.” He then went on to give a free verse translation of the Homeric episode into Latin. From their flowery meadow by the sea the sirens sing to Odysseus: “We have foreknowledge of all that is going to happen on this fruitful earth.” It is for this the hero struggles to join them, not for their personal charms. Yet, however promising that sounds, it means that they can give warning of disaster, too, and their meadow is strewn with the mouldering remains of their prey. Cicero, in the transmission of sirens’ mythology, failed to prevail over the more popular, Christian folklore portraying them as *femmes fatales*. (1994, 399)

These popular Christian associations with the siren, as well as the cultural controversies around this creature, are reflected in Czerwińska-Rydel’s work. Konstancja’s talent, knowledge, wisdom, and intelligence cannot compete with the social inclination towards stigmatizing her. The girl is the Other, hence she might pose a threat. Even Konstancja herself has negative associations with this mythological creature. When she first hears from an interlocutor that she resembles a siren, she is dismayed by the comparison, as she recalls from mythology that sirens can bring misfortune upon others. Significantly, the

chapter that includes this scene ends with a phrase taken from the *Odyssey*, book 12: “If any one unwarily draws in too close and hears the singing of the Sirens, his wife and children will never welcome him home again...” (Homer, ed. Pérezgonzález 2005, 97). Consequently, Konstancja begins to perceive herself as (*pace* the anachronism) a *femme fatale*.

As Warner concludes, “[p]assion and poetry: bane and boon. The anxiety about word-music and its lure – the fear of seductive speech – changes character and temper down the centuries, but the sirens’ reputation does not improve” (1994, 402). The comparisons to sirens that recur in the novel seem to be of great significance: Konstancja is as ambiguous as they are, beautiful but confusing, talented but hypothetically dangerous, interesting but baffling. And, just like historical “human monsters”, she gives people a shiver of both fear and excitement.

The Baltic Siren is a work which presents both the cultural and individual biography of the “beast”. In the first case, this “beast” is the siren, an ambiguous creature that appears throughout the book in many different forms, intertextually referring to various works of culture, including ancient ones. In the second case, Konstancja herself is presented as a “beast” in a way that refers to many narratives about so-called “human monsters”. All things considered, we can interpret this biographical novel as a universal story about otherness. The narration, as well as the intertexts, suggests that “monstrosity” is in the eye of the beholder. In fact, Konstancja is an exceptional woman, not a “beast”, but her society cannot see her this way. The otherness of the “Baltic Siren” is her womanhood, a feature that stops her from being a “normal” artist in the world of traditional conventions. Therefore, Czerwińska-Rydel’s book seems to suggest that the mythical sirens’ monstrosity can be seen as a convention too. Maybe these hybrid creatures, with their wonderful voices and animal features, were perceived as dangerous because they are females in a way which goes beyond gender stereotypes?

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Remnants of Myth, Vestiges of Tragedy: Peter Pan in the Mermaids' Lagoon

“[W]hen he tumbles, which is often, he comes to the ground like a Greek god.”
J. M. Barrie, *The Little White Bird, or Adventures in Kensington Gardens*
(1902), 5

“Peter had seen many tragedies but he had forgotten them all.”
J. M. Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* (1911), 103

The mermaid is a pretext: while focusing on the figure of the mermaid¹ in J. M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy*, the present chapter adopts a larger perspective in which the ancient mythical elements are inoculated as it were into the tissue of modern culture. This inoculation or engrafting on the one hand harks back to the classical tradition, and on the other, in a radical gesture, transforms it by

¹ For the purpose of my analysis I will follow J. M. Barrie's blending of the ancient figure of the Siren with the more modern image of the mermaid. What is most significant is that all of Barrie's Peter Pan works are imbued with a sense of mourning that seems to be one of the earliest characteristics of the funerary Sirens, who accompanied the souls of the dead. The figure of the part-woman, part-bird creatures that sang to Odysseus in Homer, and the later creature whose image has been imprinted in the collective consciousness by Hans Christian Andersen's 1837 “The Little Mermaid” – a story of a body looking for a soul – have clearly been influenced by multiple sources. There are also the naiads, and, in Slavic folklore, *rusalki* and *świtezianki*, as well as other water sprites and undines. Jacqueline Leclercq-Marx has analyzed both Siren-birds and Siren-fish in her exhaustive and richly illustrated study and has concluded that their image is to a great extent negative: “Courtisanes ou redoutables oiseaux, personnages historiques ou monstres mythiques symboliques, quelle qu'ait été la manière dont on interpréta les Sirènes, ce fut toujours de façon négative: leur caractère inquiétant tient essentiellement, nous l'avons vu, à leur rapport symbolique ou supposé réel avec la sexualité et la mort. Parfois, tout de même, elles apparaissent dissociées de ces deux domaines dans quelques interprétations allégoriques. Dans ce cas, elles figurent d'autres types de tentations que celles de la chair ou d'autres vices que la luxure mais souvent leur symbolisme est encore déterminé par la notion ambiguë de charme” (Leclercq-Marx 2014).

liberating the modern protagonist from ancient myth. The two cultural and psychological forces that are at stake here are memory and forgetting. Close textual analysis will be preceded by an inquiry into the intellectual repercussions of the persistence of the mythical in the thought of Johann Jakob Bachofen, the nineteenth-century Swiss sociologist and anthropologist who posited the idea of myths as transcendent universal heritage, part of a holistic understanding of culture, and the Jewish-German critic Walter Benjamin, who analyzed the brutal force of myth and the need to overcome it. At the same time, Mikhail Bakhtin's late rendition of the concept of the *chronotope* – as that which enables us to enter the sphere of meaning – allows for a presentation of various heterotopic elements of the novel. Last but not least, I will be rounding off my analysis with the help of the contemporary Polish thinker and literary critic Adam Lipszyc. I will consider only Barrie's literary texts rather than their later film adaptations in order to separate his original image of the mermaid from those offered by popular culture which merit a separate study.

Mythical Lamentation: The Encapsulation of Loss

The continuing presence of classical myth in modern and post-modern culture, and perhaps especially in children's literature, is undeniable. "Partly because we learn about myths in our childhood, partly because they belong to Antiquity, they are an integral part of our private past", asserts Joseph Brodsky in his essay on Rainer Maria Rilke's *Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes* (Brodsky 1995a, 396). Whether because the child recapitulates the process of development of the human species (in a kind of "ontology repeats phylogeny" moment) or simply because mythology still belongs to the foundational elements of *Bildung*, myth appeals to children.² While originally myths were not meant specifically for children at all, nowadays it is children's literature that is no longer meant for children only.³ This is perhaps the unifying strength of both: myth and children's literature address something so primal, so archetypal, that it cannot be easily contained, nor does it have an expiration date. As Johann Jakob Bachofen wrote

² "Myths have power, especially the original ones, not the modern retellings", says one twelve-year-old. "There's something to them that is not completely understood. And in distinction to fairy tales, they don't always end in the same way, that the princess marries the prince" (a twelve-year-old boy in a conversation with this chapter's author; Sopot, August 2017).

³ "Today there is a revolution occurring in children's literature that challenges the divide that has long existed between literature for children and literature for adults", writes Christina Phillips-Mattson (2017, 2). Her main example is the eponymous Harry Potter series, but she does spend a lot of time on J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* books, carefully analyzing the differences between the ones meant for adults versus the ones for children.

in 1861, myths are the treasury “in which the ancients had set forth the earliest memories of their history, the entire sum of their physical knowledge, the recollection of earlier periods of creation and great tellurian transformations”.⁴ Bachofen bases his understanding of myths on a contemplation of ancient tombs and sarcophagi. As he explains, in mortuary art, language on its own is insufficient to express the mystery of life and death: “Only the symbol and the related myth can meet this higher need” (Bachofen 1992, 49).⁵ The need for myth is thus underlined there where the metaphysical takes us beyond deictic language. But in fact what Bachofen posits is myth as language, i.e. the mythical language of lament.

Sirens are the mythical creatures that attempt to bind us through sound⁶ and at the same time, Sirens are linked to both, death and forgetting, as well as mourning.⁷ Barrie’s works that feature Peter Pan, from *The Little White Bird* (1902) to *Peter and Wendy* (1911), all contain elements of mourning and lamentation, as well as Greek mythology. Even without recourse to Barrie’s biography, it is obvious that any story of a child who leaves the human world at eight days old never to return is a story of loss. “But myths have no other seat in men save memory; and a myth whose subject is loss only more so”, writes Brodsky (1995a, 396) about the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, but his dictum might as well serve as an epigraph to *Peter and Wendy*. The elements of loss and mourning are most obvious in *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (especially in the “Lock-Out Time” chapter), but are present in all of Barrie’s Peter Pan novels and plays, whether they be about time lost or lost love.⁸ Needless to say, lamentation and tragedy are among the most ancient literary genres. It is Barrie’s genius that he combines and then transforms them in such a way that the result is

⁴ Trans. Ralph Manheim in Bachofen (1992, 48).

⁵ It is important to note here that the great children’s advocate, pedagogue, paediatrician, and author, Janusz Korczak, believed that among the most basic children’s rights is the right to death. See Lifton (2005, 361–362).

⁶ For an iconoclastic reading of the suffering inflicted by sound, i.e. music as pain in the context of a modern interpretation of the myth of the Sirens, see Quignard (1997), especially the chapter entitled “Le chant des Sirènes” (163–182).

⁷ “Developing the Sirens’ link with death and forgetfulness as well as music, Euripides has Helen call out to Persephone, goddess of the Underworld, to send sirens to her to share her grief: ‘Winged maidens, virgin daughters of Earth, the Sirens, may you come to my mourning with Libyan flute or pipe or lyre, tears to match my plaintive woes; grief for grief and mournful chant for chant, may Persephone send choirs of death in harmony with my lamentation’ (see Euripides, *Helen*, 167–178)” (Panoply Vase Animation Project 2013).

⁸ For a discussion of the elements of mourning as well as the role of Peter as a psychopomp in the 1906 novel, see my chapter on “The Aftermath of Myth through the Lens of Walter Benjamin in J. M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* and in Astrid Lindgren’s *Karlsson on the Roof*” (Jerzak 2016, 44–54).

radically modern. In his seminal study of lamentation, Gershom Sholem considers it to be organically connected to myth:

Lamentation is, in its deepest sense, mythical. In it, myth itself seeks exit to a world to which there is no access, in which one can and cannot be, but into which, since eternity, no one can reach from another world. In lamentation, mythical enchantment (with which it was perhaps originally enmeshed) is shattered by the unheard-of linguistic phenomenon of the border. The order of lament itself destroys the possibility of exploiting its magic as enchantment: enchanted words must not be tragic. (2014, 318)

Barrie's novel, despite its ostensible light-heartedness, is situated at the nexus of what, after several thousand years, has remained of myth, tragedy, and lamentation. With strands of memory, forgetting, and the power of generational transmission of melancholy wisdom, Barrie weaves a story that captures a new myth, perhaps liberated from the old, and above all existentially valid and relevant for the new era.

Mythical Memory: We, Too, Have Been There

"All children, except one, grow up" (Barrie 1991, 69). Thus opens Barrie's iconic 1911 novel about Peter Pan, *Peter and Wendy*. This opening signal is, however, twofold: it could be read as a lament over the irrepressible passage of time, and, simultaneously, as a eulogy of Peter's unique status. Neverland, the space of the child's mind that the author maps for us, is an island, but while purporting to be a place, it is truly a kind of time, or, rather, as Mikhail Bakhtin would say, a *chronotope*,⁹ a particular spatial and temporal framework within which the novel builds its world: "We too have been there; we can still hear the sound of the surf though we shall land no more" (74). Later in the novel, the same image will be reinforced with the telling figure of the mermaids: "[...] you might see the surf and hear the mermaids singing" (140).

This archetypal scene appears to be a metaphor of memory – we recall our childhood, or, rather, it calls to us, but we can no longer *go there*. While the sense of hearing is privileged here, allowing for at least a one-way communication, all action is nevertheless precluded.¹⁰ We overhear our own past without the

⁹ Acknowledging that the Bakhtinian idea goes well beyond literary generic considerations, Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson see *chronotope* as "an integral way of understanding experience, and a ground for visualizing and representing human life" (1990, 375). For an informed treatment of the notion of *chronotope* in children's literature see Nikolajeva (1988 and 2015).

¹⁰ An individual's childhood, then, is like the past of the species. This is the condition described by Brodsky in our relation to Antiquity: "We won't be admitted into

grace of return. In Barrie's book this particular account of aching to return, or nostalgia, can also be read as a refiguring of the Sirens' song: the Odyssean feat is precisely in hearing the sound and not making a landing.¹¹ English literature has known the illustrious formulation of refusing to heed that call since John Milton, who believed that a work of poetry should not "be obtained by the invocation of Dame Memory and her Siren daughters" (Milton 1957, 671). Already in the 1904 play *Peter Pan, or the Boy Who Would Not Grow Up* Barrie constructs a chronotopic notion of the self that corresponds to a house simultaneously inhabited by different temporal versions of one's being. The privileged sense is vision rather than hearing, but there is an equal sentiment of having been barred from participating in the past except as a spectator:

Some say that we are different people at different periods of our lives, changing not through effort of will, which is a brave affair, but in the easy course of nature every ten years or so. [...] I think one remains the same person throughout, merely passing, as it were, in these lapses of time from one room to another, but all in the same house. If we unlock the rooms of the far past we can peer in and see ourselves, busily occupied in beginning to become you and me. Thus, if I am the author in question the way he is to go should already be showing in the occupant of my first compartment, at whom I now take the liberty to peep.¹²

Both scenarios – of hearing the surf unable to land, or of watching one's earlier self and giving a writerly account of that vision – are highly theatrical, dramatic. Both also imply a certain circularity of experience: rather than posit the individual's development along a line, Barrie suggests a mode of a possible return to childhood, as if every lifetime were a unit contained in a spatial whole. So instead of a time machine, Barrie offers his readers a self that is a container of time, its receptacle. Not explicitly tragic, this model of the temporal accumulation of past selves is akin to Marcel Proust's formulation (which follows only several years after Barrie's novel in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, 1913–1927). In Proust's vision there are layers and layers of past selves that accumulate in us in a sedimentary manner but can be awoken by taste and smell: hence the surreptitious return to childhood thanks to the madeleine and the lime-blossom tea. Barrie, however, perceives childhood as a heterotopic realm, pieced together with fragments of the so-called real world and of the imaginary. No wonder then that the best metaphor for this realm is an island.

antiquity: it being well inhabited – in fact, overpopulated – as it was. No point in busting your knuckles against marble" (1955b, 272).

¹¹ For an inspired discussion of the role of nostalgia in, among others, J. M. Barrie and Marcel Proust, see Carol Mavor's chapter "My Book Has a Disease" (2008, 23–56).

¹² The play *Peter Pan; or: The Boy Who Would Not Grow Up* was first performed on December 27, 1904 in London and did not appear in print until 1928. See the full text of the play on Project Gutenberg Australia, Barrie (2003).

An island is by definition delimited, surrounded as it is by a different element, water. Its separateness gives the island a distinct ontological character and this means that one can experience the unusual more intensely there. Barrie's *Neverland*, first introduced in the 1904 play, is the most unusual of all islands because it is home to a most heterotopic collection. First the narrator mentions coral reefs and pirate ships, but then proceeds to place gnomes, savages, and "princes with six elder brothers" alongside them. Gently mocking stock fairy-tale figures and children's literature characters, Barrie adds a fair amount of so-called reality:

There is also first day at school, religion, fathers, the Round Pond, needlework, murders, hangings, verbs that take the dative, chocolate-pudding day, getting into braces, say ninety-nine, threepence for pulling out your tooth yourself and so on; and either these are part of the island or they are another map showing through, and it is all rather confusing especially as nothing will stand still. (Barrie 1991, 73–74)

This patchwork counter-space that Barrie posits as the quintessence of childhood is indeed reminiscent of the space of exception that Adam Lipszyc describes in his article "Mít i terytorium" [Myth and Territory]:

Linia mityczna jest czymś, co zawsze jest tuż przed nami, na co – by tak rzec – zawsze zaraz nastąpimy; linia rewolucyjna (czy wobec jej lokalnego charakteru nie lepiej mówić: „linia krytyczna”?) to wprowadzana przez nas linia miejscowego działania, rozszczepienie mitycznej przestrzeni. Nie wytycza się jej po to, by czegoś zakazywać lub ustanawiać suwerenną władzę na pewnym terytorium, lecz po to, by zaznaczyć różnicę w obrębie demonicznej, dwuznacznej homogeniczności, wprowadzić patchworkową przeciwpstrzeń, otwierającą możliwość alternatywnych praktyk. Utopijna, nie osiągalna nigdy przestrzeń wyjątku składałaby się może wyłącznie z takich linii krytycznych. (Lipszyc 2016, 129)¹³

The mythical line is that which is always right in front of us, that which we might step upon at any moment; the revolutionary line (or, better yet, because of its local character, "the critical line") is the line of local activity, introduced by us to split the space of myth. The critical line is not drawn to forbid something or to establish sovereignty on a certain territory but in order to mark a difference within a demonic, ambiguous homogeneity, to introduce a patchwork counter-space that would open a possibility of alternative practices. The utopian, unattainable space of exception would be composed, perhaps, exclusively of such critical lines.

¹³ The Polish text kept for its artistic value. The English translation of all quoted fragments by Lipszyc is mine. While I am not interested here in the political reverberations of Peter Pan's *Neverland*, the topic has been discussed, notably by Wasinger (2006).

Following Walter Benjamin, Lipszyc is, of course, discussing myth in its broadest possible meaning as a certain totality that binds us, while the counter-space is outlined with the radical, individual lines of flight, of breaking away from the ruthlessness of fate.

The Hybrid Chronotope of the Mermaid

It should come as no surprise then that this heterotopic catalogue, one worthy of Jorge Luis Borges, eventually comes to contain mermaids as well. Beginning with Homer, the Sirens were hybrid monsters, half woman and half bird, that inhabited an island from which they lured passing sailors with their enchanting song. What is significant in the context of *Peter and Wendy*, a novel whose one of the central themes is motherhood, is that according to Ovid (*Met.* 5.512–562), the Sirens were the companions of young Persephone and they were given wings by Demeter to search for her daughter after she had been abducted. Mermaids first appear as bait of sorts when Peter tries to convince Wendy (whose middle name, incidentally, is Moira, not Persephone; the latter would have been fitting because her story is one of abduction and a mother's suffering but Moira is a telling name as well with its connotation of Destiny) to abandon her mother and come to Neverland with him:

‘And, Wendy, there are mermaids.’

‘Mermaids! With tails?’

‘Such long tails.’

‘Oh,’ cried Wendy, ‘to see a mermaid!’ (Barrie 1991, 97)

Just as the boys are lured by the promise of pirates, Wendy is tempted by Peter's promise to teach them all how to fly and to show them mermaids. We are to understand that seeing mermaids is a most extraordinary experience, one worthy of the pain that Wendy's disappearance will inflict on her mother. There is no explanation, because it was common knowledge that these mythical creatures contain a promise, if not of happiness, then at least of enchantment. The readers are presumed to share this expectation just as they presumably know both Greek mythology and Hans Christian Andersen's classic “The Little Mermaid” and thus would not ask who the mermaids were and why they were so enchanting. Any contemporary reader would have remembered the Sirens' song from the *Odyssey*, promising the hero the recognition of his past suffering and a prophetic vision of what is to come. It is a promise of both empathy and commemoration:

ἀλλ' ὃ γε τερψάμενος νεῖται καὶ πλείονα εἰδώς,
 ἴδμεν γάρ τοι πάνθ' ὅσ' ἐνὶ Τροίῃ εὐρείῃ
 Ἄργεῖοι Τρῶές τε θεῶν ἰότητι μόγησαν,
 ἴδμεν δ', ὅσσα γένηται ἐπὶ χθονὶ πουλυβοτείρῃ. (Hom. *Od.* 12.188–191)

Once he hears to his heart's content, sails on, a wiser man.
 We know all the pains that the Greeks and Trojans once endured
 on the spreading plain of Troy when the gods willed it so –
 all that comes to pass on the fertile earth, we know it all!¹⁴

Peter Pan, however, is not exactly a hero. A protagonist with many heroic qualities, he is nonetheless closer to the modern definition of the anti-hero. That he does not even remember the mermaids after an encounter with them is the first sign to Wendy that there is something amiss with the boy: “[...] he would come up with mermaid scales still sticking to him, and yet not be able to say for certain what had been happening. [...] ‘And if he forgets them so quickly,’ Wendy argued, ‘how can we expect that he will go on remembering us?’” (Barrie 1991, 104). Without memory there would be neither myth nor tragedy, so Peter here appears both maimed as it were, depleted of the ability to remember his experiences, and at the same time both somewhat protected from horror, and subversive. Without memory, there is no trauma. Without memory, there are no songs of innocence and experience: time is qualitatively different. That is Peter's chronotope. Neverland as the heterotopic, patchwork space of exception on which childhood thrives and which adulthood barely recognizes, combined with a truncated time, soothingly circular in the manner of Benjamin's carousel, together proffer a chronotope that allows at least the readers to partake in an experience out of time and everyday space. Using poetic license, Barrie breaks the rigid frames of myth as such. His subjects are human beings and “betwixt-and-between” creatures who effortlessly swim in and out of narrative. Because we feel we all know a Wendy or perhaps some of us are Wendy, it is much easier to follow the identification all the way and to accept the varied hybrid creatures in good faith. Seemingly ordinary, quotidian scenes acquire a metaphysical dimension.

Mrs. Darling is a mysterious creature herself as she is part finite woman and mother, and part something else: the enigmatic kiss in the corner of her mouth and the infinite boxes in her mind, “one within the other, that come from the puzzling East” (Barrie 1991, 69), make her otherworldly and a kin to Peter, “he was very like Mrs. Darling's kiss” (Barrie 1991, 77). Mrs. Darling's premonition of her children's disappearance is proof of her prophetic intuition. More than that – on the fateful evening as she checks whether the window is securely fastened, the stars act as a chorus of sorts and they wink to her: “Stars are beautiful but

¹⁴ Trans. Robert Fagles in Homer (1996).

they may not take an active part in anything, they must just look on forever. It is a punishment put on them for something they did so long ago that no star now knows what it was" (Barrie 1991, 87). The stars as mute onlookers should remind us of the role our adult selves play in relation to our own childhood. Yet another image of both memory and forgetting, this figure is also profoundly mythological, for constellations represent an inscribed ancient presence; if not a message then at least a sign from the past. When, on a summer night, one looks at the window and, unexpectedly, beholds the Big Dipper suspended over the houses across the street, the semiotic delight of such a discovery is due precisely to the fact that, as Brodsky writes, ordinarily "we look at antiquity as if out of nowhere" (1995b, 266). To behold a sign from the past belies the statement that "[w]hile antiquity exists for us, we, for antiquity, do not" (ibid.).

No wonder that Benjamin developed an entire concept of the language of the stars that is no longer clear to us, a proto-language of sorts that only children still understand. In Benjamin's account of myth and law ("Critique of Violence", 1986b), Niobe is punished for her hubris by the violent death of her children. That is her fate, but it is also the law that Apollo and Artemis mete out. Niobe's fault is that she challenges fate by overstepping the border between gods and mortals. Thus, the myth which Benjamin uses in his essay is a myth of establishing borders. The same myth also serves Benjamin to underline the difference between mythical violence which is "pure presence and power" (Hanssen 1998, 132) and divine violence that is justice. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* is about separation and borders as well and about different understandings of violence and power. It is about the borders between childhood and adulthood, inside and outside, mother and child, freedom and unfreedom. The mermaid figure itself, not central to the Peter Pan narrative, is a hybrid. The hybrid nature of the mermaid is a distant mirror of the Peter Pan from Kensington Gardens who is defined as a "betwixt-and-between", neither human nor bird, tragically outcast from both worlds and sentenced to a perpetual exile. As the chapter "The Mermaids' Lagoon" opens, the lagoon looms ever so close – you see it "if you shut your eyes and are a lucky one" (Barrie 1991, 140) and if there could be two moments like that, "you might see the surf and hear the mermaids singing" (ibid.). The lagoon, in itself a hybrid body of water, is a place of enchantment where the mermaids play, but, not to idealize it, the narrator adds that "Wendy never had a civil word from one of them", thus blending the chronotope of lagoon and that of a salon, the bourgeois living room. The mermaids do not let Wendy come too close, and when she does, they dive "probably splashing her with their tails, not by accident but intentionally" (ibid.). Peter, however, is not only on good terms with them but has some power over them: "[...] he sat on their tails when they got cheeky" (ibid.), a characteristically comic gesture. What is even more significant and recalls Peter's role as both messenger and go-between, Peter gives Wendy one of the mermaids' combs. This gesture seems both endearing and transgressive, especially since the comb

is an object used in grooming hair, and hair is one of the elements that mermaids – and women – use as a means of attraction.

Mermaids are liminal creatures and – faithful to their Sirenic origin – they tempt mortals with their song. There is a sense of foreboding in the description of the lagoon by moonlight, when the mermaids “utter strange wailing cries” (Barrie 1991, 140). This sets the stage for the near death of Tiger Lily, the Indian girl captured by the pirates who leave her on the rock to drown. When Peter and Wendy witness this, Wendy cries, “for it was the first tragedy she had seen” (143). Peter, we are told, “had seen many tragedies but he had forgotten them all” (ibid.). Nonetheless he wants to save Tiger Lily because he objects to two against one – he is on the side of justice here, or at least fair play – and he succeeds in freeing the girl by using an Odyssean sort of trick. He imitates the voice of Captain Hook and tells the pirates to let her go. But moments later, in the process of playing the game twenty questions with Hook, a kind of animal, vegetable, mineral game that puts in focus the mixed, hybrid nature of both the characters and the text itself, Peter betrays his identity.

According to Benjamin, in the mythical universe a mortal is subjected to ruthless fate. Tragedy, however, offers an elevated exit from the brutal force of myth. Peter Pan is a tragic boy but he is at once a comic character capable of freeing himself from mythical reality. Peter, whose “each tragic action [...] casts a comic shadow” (Benjamin 1986a, 311), successfully subdues the notion of monstrous myth. If, however, one lingers as a Peter Pan, one might turn into a J. Alfred Prufrock, who has “heard the mermaids singing, each to each” (Eliot 1934, 8). Between Peter Pan’s moral immaturity and Prufrock’s abject *senilità*, there is yet room to live as Odysseus, and to return to an island that is Ithaca, not Neverland. It is remarkable that T. S. Eliot wrote “The Love-Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” in 1910 (it was published in 1915), precisely around the time when Barrie was in the midst of his Peter Pan series. If Peter is at home in the space of exception and on good terms with the mermaids, Prufrock is at home nowhere, especially not in London, and he laments his condition everywhere. The poem ends with a gripping account of being able to hear and see the mermaids while unable to do anything. What if Prufrock were Peter Pan grown old?

I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.
 I do not think that they will sing to me.
 I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
 Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
 When the wind blows the water white and black.
 We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
 By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
 Till human voices wake us, and we drown. (Eliot 1934, 8–9)

Neither Wendy nor Peter drown even though a mermaid does try to pull Wendy down: “As they lay side by side a mermaid caught Wendy by the feet and began

pulling her softly into the water” (Barrie 1991, 151). Peter saves her but they both prepare to die because, wounded by Hook, Peter can neither swim nor fly. As to Peter’s possible death, it seems unlikely, for there is much evidence of his immortality – including a hint that he may be already dead. At the climactic point in the Mermaids’ Lagoon chapter, something brushes against Peter’s cheek “as light as a kiss” (ibid.). It is the tail of the kite that Wendy’s brother Michael had made some days before – a toy that will lift Wendy to safety, back to life. “Already he had tied the tail round her” (ibid., 152). Thus the mermaid’s tail becomes a kite tail. From the potentially monstrous and fatal, the tail is now a harbinger of salvation, heaven-bound. Wendy, instead of being metamorphosed into a fish-tailed mermaid, becomes a different hybrid, a near angel. But Wendy also returns to the nursery, and then grows up, marries, and has a daughter named Jane, whom Peter also takes to Neverland at spring-cleaning time, and then Jane in turn grows up to have a daughter... All along Peter remains faithful to himself, never growing up and always needing for someone to be his mother. Thus, Barrie takes us from the brutal force of myth, through the cathartic power of tragedy towards the salvation of the ever-recurring fairy tale. Peter and Wendy is ultimately a story less linear than it is circular, and as such impervious to the dangers of time.

Conclusions

In his discussion of tragedy, comedy, and justice in the book devoted to Benjamin’s *œuvre*, Lipszyc writes that according to Benjamin only two figures are able to liberate themselves from the power of myth: the tragic hero and the comic one. “Tragedy”, writes Lipszyc, “should be understood in its relation to myth, and the tragic hero’s path – as the way out of myth” (Lipszyc 2012, 47). If Peter Pan is a tragic hero, it is because he is utterly alone, and his tragic character is as if mute. “The paradox of the birth of genius in moral speechlessness, moral infantilism, is the sublimity of tragedy”, claims Benjamin in “Fate and Character” (1986a). Moral infantilism characterizes Peter from the beginning to the end, or, rather, endlessly. He cannot be, however, a completely tragic character, for he does not die (unless, of course, we are willing to see his initial escape through the window as a metaphor of death). In his essay, Benjamin posits the comic hero as the one who is impermeable to the power of myth. Lipszyc reads this statement as qualitatively different from the tragic hero’s predicament: the comic hero has no fate, only character. As such, the hero is free from myth and moves about in a space of freedom. Peter Pan is both the tragic hero who struggles against fate and the comic hero whose character remains static:

Jeżeli więc istnieje ścieżka wyzwolenia z mitu, która wiedzie ku „pełnoletniemu” człowieczeństwu, należy jej szukać gdzieś między tragedią, która nie dosięga

pełnoletniości, a komedią, która żyje bez bliźni w innej przestrzeni, gdzie zmagania z mitem nie są nawet przeszłością. (Lipszyc 2012, 49)

If, then, there exists a path of liberation from myth that leads towards “mature” humanity, it is to be found somewhere between tragedy that does not reach maturity and comedy that lives without scars in a different space, in which struggles with myth are not even part of the past.

Twenty-first-century culture focuses on issues of memory and commemoration, but in human history, memory is the exception rather than the rule. The origins of myth are largely forgotten. By engrafting elements of myth in his *œuvre*, Barrie, like Bachofen before and Brodsky after him, associates myth with the collective memory of the species. Between Benjaminian stifling totality of myth and the anodyne nullity of pulp fiction, there is Barrie’s legerdemain Peter Pan, forever surrounded by mermaids, Pirates, Indians, and the Lost Boys, with a Wendy Mother in the offing. When we no longer recognize myth in myth, we will have lost culture as we know it.

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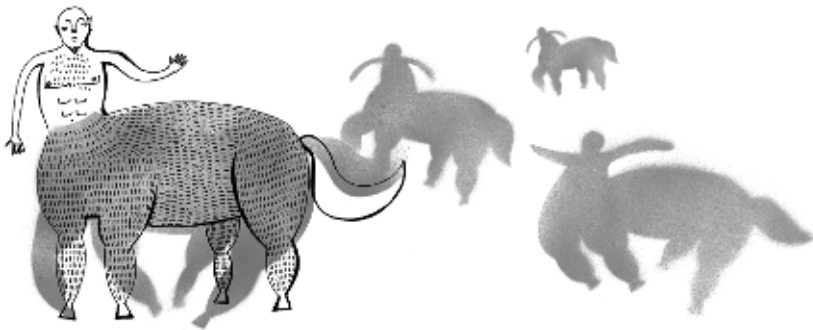
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PART 3

HORNED AND HOOFED: RIDING INTO THE ADULTHOOD



Maja Abgarowicz, *Centaurs* (2020).
Illustration referring to the 2012 Workshop of Prof. Zygmunt Januszewski,
Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw.

BETTINA KÜMMERLING-MEIBAUER

On the Trail of Pan: The Blending of References to Classical Antiquity and Romanticism in J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*

The Greek god Pan is an extremely interesting figure which has always had a presence in literature and which experienced a revival during the late Victorian period, culminating in an astounding resurgence of interest in the Pan motif between 1890 and 1930 in literature and the arts (see Merival 1969; Adami 2000). In this regard John Keats' "Hymn to Pan", as part of the author's epic poem *Endymion* (1818), played a seminal role, as Keats blended the ideal of the pastoral god Pan with the "great Pan" topic, paving the way for a new interpretation of the Pan myth, which was taken up and varied by the Romanticists and *fin-de-siècle* authors (see Dingley 1992; Boardman 1998). In this era Pan represented two opposite ideas: he was associated with fertility and life-giving forces as well as connected with death and terror. In addition, the Pan figure transitioned into children's literature at the beginning of the twentieth century, making for instance an appearance in the novels *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) by Kenneth Grahame, *The Secret Garden* (1911) by Frances Hodgson Burnett, and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950) by C. S. Lewis (see Kimball 2002; Kümmerling-Meibauer 2006; Bazovsky 2018). However, the most prominent and still frequently discussed book is *Peter Pan* (1911) by James Matthew Barrie, whose main character has undoubtedly become an essential part of popular culture.

After his first appearance in the adult novel *The Little White Bird* (1902) and the theatre play *Peter Pan* (1904), Peter Pan became the title character of the famous children's novel *Peter and Wendy* (1911), whose title was later changed to *Peter Pan* after the book was translated into other languages and the Disney animation film appeared in 1953. The translations and film adaptation contributed greatly to the worldwide success of Barrie's novel. Due to the expiration of the copyright in 1989, innumerable adaptations, sequels, and prequels have come

out since the end of the 1980s (see Stirling 2012; Kümmerling-Meibauer 2017).¹ From the start, the ambiguity of the Peter Pan character has bewildered readers and catalyzed a vigorous debate among scholars about the cultural construction of childhood that governs Barrie's novel, leading them to critically scrutinize his pertinent characteristics and the reasons for his attraction for the other characters in the books. Since the appearance of Jacqueline Rose's benchmark study, *The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (1984), the status of Barrie's novel as a book targeted only at children has been disputed time and again. In this respect, Rose and others argue that the complicated character of Peter Pan displays an image of childhood which may attract adults and goes beyond the bounds of a child readership. They point out that the idea of the "child who would not grow up" is determined by a feeling of nostalgia and displays a controversial idea of how childhood could be understood.

However, what exactly constitutes this image of childhood has provoked a lively debate in academia. While several scholars have mentioned the intertextual references to the Greek god Pan in passing, the impact of this allusion on the significance of the story and the main character as well as its blending with other concepts of childhood, particularly the tight connection with the romantic motif of the "strange child", have been totally underestimated. This chapter, therefore, intends to fill these noticeable research gaps by showing that the perplexing character of Peter Pan represents a blending of references to the ancient god Pan and E. T. A. Hoffmann's romantic fairy tale *Das fremde Kind* [The Strange Child, 1817], which introduced an innovative image of childhood into international children's literature.

The Pan Figure in Greek Mythology and Beyond

In classical Greek mythology, Pan is the god of the shepherds, who resides in the utopian setting of Arcadia. He shows theriomorphic traits, that is, he has the hind legs, feet, and horns of a goat, but a human body and an upright posture. His attributes are the flute known as the *syrinx*, a shepherd's crook, and a goatskin. There is even more to the Greek notion of *pan*, which has a double meaning: the term derives from an older root *pa* – 'guardian of flocks', while the second meaning of *pan* can be translated as 'all' (see Harris and Platzner 2004, 210). This etymological amplification feeds into the understanding of the Greek god, as he is the protective god of the shepherds and likewise, he personifies nature, which is an idea that crops up in Late Antiquity and plays a significant role in Romantic philosophy and thought. In addition, from the beginning Pan is re-

¹ The copyright was renewed in 1995, which implies that most of the sequels are unauthorized, with a few exceptions, such as *Neverland* (1989) by Toby Forward and *Peter Pan in Scarlet* (2006) by Geraldine McCaughrean, which was commissioned by the copyright holder.

garded as swaying between divine and beastly features, which also impact on his unforeseen and ambiguous behaviour.

The first strand of reception relates to the shifting characteristics of Pan. In the middle of the fifth century BCE, Pan's appearance changed from an animalistic to an anthropomorphic character: from this point on he is represented as a young man with horns and goat hooves. As a son of Dryope and Hermes – other sources speculate that Zeus Lykaios, Apollo, and even Cronos are his potential fathers – he roams the wilderness, accompanied by nymphs and satyrs (see Bourgeaud 1988). Several ancient sources refer to the myth that Pan's mother was so terrified by her son's goatish appearance that she abandoned him immediately after birth (cf. Grant and Hazel 1993, 254–255).

Herodotus reported that Pan led the Athenian people in a victorious battle against the Persian army. In this connection he mentioned the panic-stricken fear among the Persian soldiers caused by the appearance of Pan. Later on, Theocritus picked up this idea by referring to the “hour of Pan” (usually noon), in which Pan occasionally terrifies the shepherds and their flocks. Moreover, Pan has often been accredited with sexually harassing nymphs and young boys, and thus symbolizes obsessive and aggressive sexual behaviour.

While Lucretius considered Pan a symbolic figure that testifies to the divine presence in nature, Virgil and Ovid handed down the widely adopted story of the nymph Syrinx, who morphed into reeds in order to escape Pan's pursuit. Inspired by the wailing sound of the reeds, Pan invented a flute that bears the nymph's name and from then on has been portrayed as an attribute of Pan (also known as the pan flute). Being conceited about his musical skills and in need of adoring followers, Pan even challenged Apollo to a competition in the vain hope of trumping the god of music (cf. Bulfinch 1998, 74).

A second important strand of reception is the legend of the “Death of the Great Pan” as evidence of the mortality of the ancient gods (see Bulfinch 1998, 210). Plutarch passed on the story of an Egyptian steersman who, sailing along the Greek coasts during the reign of Tiberius, heard a voice that commanded him to announce the death of Pan. After having called this message out loud, the sailor claimed to have heard a multitude of wailing voices. According to the Fathers of the Church, the end of the pagan gods is tightly connected with the birth of Christ. Since then Pan has been regarded as a representative of the demonic forces of the ancient gods, thus bringing him into proximity with the devil (see Robert 2000, 540). Equally important in this context is the earlier explanation by Plato in the *Kratylos* (fourth century BCE), who emphasizes that Pan's dual nature – as both animal and human – refers to the capacity of human discourse to sway between truth and lie (cf. Robert 2000, 539).

To a greater or lesser extent, these characteristics have determined the reception of Pan in literature and the arts since Classical Antiquity and also have influenced the depiction of the Pan figure in children's literature in general and in Barrie's *Peter Pan* in particular. What makes this figure especially attractive

for authors as well as children is his ambivalent status: as a hybrid character he combines human and beastly qualities, standing on the threshold between two modes of existence.

The Many Facets of Barrie's Pan Figure

A wealth of studies have investigated the genesis of Barrie's famous children's book.² The Pan figure initially appeared in Barrie's adult novel *The Little White Bird* (1902), in which Peter Pan is described as a "betwixt-and-between" (17),³ half bird, half human, who secretly lives in London's Kensington Gardens. In any event, the hybrid nature of Peter Pan is questioned later on: while the text initially asserts that he was hatched and fell out of a bird's nest, Peter Pan himself claims that he ran away the day he was born (91).⁴ The idea of situating the Pan figure in London was inspired by Matthew Arnold's renowned poem "Lines Written in Kensington Gardens" (1867), in which the poet describes the Kensington Gardens park as the place where the spirit of the rural Pan could be captured in childhood only.

The chapters which dwell on Peter Pan's adventures were published separately as a children's book, *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, in 1906. The main character's name already indicates his complicated nature. The juxtaposition of the common name "Peter" and the Greek word "Pan", which alludes to the Greek god of the same name, corresponds to the character's potentially ambiguous position as half human, half god.

The Dionysian side of Pan – running wild, wandering the woods and the fields, carousing with nymphs and satyrs, and playing tricks on people – characterizes Peter Pan as well. In parallel with this, he behaves like a spoiled and egotistical child, keen on having fun and strictly following his own ideas without considering the effects of this on other people's lives. His famous crow, with which he expresses great joy, is a clear indicator of his egotism and hedonism. Peter Pan roams around Kensington Gardens and refuses to take on any responsibility, which is most evident in his decision to never go back to his mother,⁵

² There are manifold versions of the different manuscripts, which testify to Barrie's difficulties with this narrative. For quite a long time he even refused to see the text of the novel in print, instead relying on the theatre play as the ultimate version of the story.

³ All references to the texts by Barrie are taken from the edition of 1991, published by Oxford University Press.

⁴ This behaviour connects Pan with Apollo and Hermes, who left the cradle and started an energetic life – Hermes, for instance, killed a turtle and turned its shell into a lyre – the very day they were born.

⁵ This situation can be interpreted as a reversal of the myth of Pan, who is abandoned by his mother at birth.

who – after years of mourning – gave birth to another child. Although he befriends the fairies, he is always an outsider among the birds and fairies that populate the park. By living out his childish needs, he shows traits of selfishness. He uses artifice and his intelligence to play pranks and is sometimes even overcome by fits of rage.

Peter Pan has the appearance of a young child – the illustrations by Arthur Rackham in the original edition depict him as a naked baby child – but his ability to fly refers to a superhuman, even divine power. While it is clearly stated that all children were birds before birth, only Peter Pan is able to keep the ability to fly without having wings – although he sometimes feels itchy at the shoulders (13). While being able to fly is no reference to Pan, two attributes of Peter Pan echo the classical god: Peter Pan plays a pipe, with which he enchants the fairies in the park, and he rides atop a goat. This considerable reference to Greek mythology has not been comprehensively investigated in studies devoted to Barrie's novel, although it is mentioned twice in the book.

In the beginning, the implied narrator who speaks to an implied listener, a boy called David, rhetorically asks whether Peter Pan ever rode on a goat (12). He supposes that David's mother would agree, while his grandmother would certainly deny this ungrudgingly. He then concludes that beginning the story of Peter Pan with a goat is "as silly as to put on your jacket before your vest" (12). The meaning of this enigmatic assertion is not truly resolved. The comparison with the order of one's jacket and vest may imply that there might be a story of Peter before the goat. Moreover, the assumed contrary statements by David's mother and grandmother contribute to readers' potential confusion, since they do not get any clues about the veracity of these opinions. In any event, the goat topic completely vanishes in the subsequent chapters, so that readers might suspect that the short fictional dialogue between the adult narrator and the boy David is merely an aside, which does not add much to the story.

However, this potential presumption is misleading, because the final chapter surprisingly resumes the goat subject, and even emphasizes its significance in the chapter heading "Peter's Goat". This chapter introduces a new character, the four-year-old girl Maimie, who hides in Kensington Gardens in order to secretly observe the dance of the fairies. In doing so she gets to know Peter Pan, to whom she initially makes a marriage proposal. However, she cannot reconcile this plan with her wish to regularly see her mother and eventually returns to her home. In order to conciliate Peter Pan Maimie decides to give him a present. Her mother suggests that Peter Pan may need a goat so that he can ride on it and play the pipe at the same time (63). When Maimie objects that she does not have such an animal, her mother suggests taking the goat with which Maimie frightened her older brother Tony for a while. Here the text is quite unspecific about the character of this particular goat. It might be a real object (like a toy animal) or pure imagination – in this respect the narrative ambiguously states that the goat had been frightfully real to both Maimie and Tony, leaving it up to the reader

how the notion of “real” should be understood. Finally, Maimie decides to surrender her goat to Peter Pan and leaves it in a fairy circle in the middle of the park. Through magic the fairies turn it into a real goat and Peter Pan makes his way on it through Kensington Gardens thereafter.

The goat points to Peter Pan’s function as the herder and protector of children as well as to his animalistic traits. While Barrie’s Peter Pan figure does not show any characteristics of a goat, having neither goat horns nor goat hooves, the animal serves as a substitute for these missing animalistic features. However, the goat unveils an additional quality, since it recalls Maimie’s former female aggression when she scared her brother. By getting rid of the goat, which represents the girl’s potential nasty behaviour, Maimie contributes to the stabilization of her family. Pulling the goat out of the domestic sphere and pushing it into the realm of fantasy is an action that mirrors Maimie’s adaptation to societal expectations as well as Peter Pan’s emerging hedonistic demeanour and sexual attraction (see Wasinger 2006, 217–235). This observation then leads to the conclusion that only through the goat can Peter eventually become Peter Pan.

The final sections of *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* connect the main character with the topic of death: whenever children get lost in the park, they are in danger of freezing to death after the gates are closed. Although Peter Pan could manage to rescue some of them, he sometimes came too late, in which case he could do nothing else but bury the children in the park, erecting little tombstones with the children’s initials. The book closes with the hopeful expression that Peter Pan does not have to do this job too often, since it is quite sad to mourn little children’s deaths.⁶

While *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* does not unambiguously give any clues about what happens to those children who are saved – most probably they are found by their despairing parents the next morning – the ensuing novel *Peter and Wendy* elaborates on this issue by establishing the fantastic island of Neverland (74), where Peter Pan and the so-called Lost Boys permanently live. This novel introduces new characters but above all it changes the appearance and deportment of Peter Pan in significant ways. Peter Pan still retains his magical power of flying without wings and his capacity to charm humans and fairies and to soothe animals with his pipe music, but he is no longer naked and the goat has gone completely. Henceforth Peter Pan is “clad in skeleton leaves” (77), continuously dropping said leaves and thus betraying his location. This unusual clothing refers to the theme of the Green Man, a pagan figure of Northern

⁶ The close affinity of Peter Pan to death refers to another mythical figure which was quite prominent in European children’s literature of that time, namely the Pied Piper of Hamelin. This figure is capable of entralling children by means of his magical flute, leading them to an unknown destiny, presumably death. Likewise, Peter Pan exerts a great influence on children due to the rumours about his magical powers, thus tempting them to stay in the park overnight, which sometimes leads to their death.

mythology that was quite popular in the United Kingdom at the turn of the twentieth century.⁷ The Green Man roams the wilderness and is regarded as a representative of untouched nature. This quality connects the Green Man with the Greek god Pan, since both have a close affinity to nature and stand for boorish and uncivilized manners. While there are many characteristics distinct to Pan, there are four that are key themes in Barrie's novel *Peter Pan*: Pan's bond with nature, his sexual powers, his ability to create a panic, and his inconsistent attitude towards truthfulness.

One of the main properties constantly associated with Pan is his connection to nature. This is particularly evident in Barrie's novel as Peter Pan lives on the island of Neverland, which is dominated by nature. Peter Pan's powerful influence on Neverland, which cannot be found on any map, comes to the fore when he returns to the island with the Darling children: the plants start to blossom and the animals awaken as if they had been cursed into a sort of hibernation (112).

At first glance, the island seems to be a safe haven, which provides Peter Pan, the Lost Boys, and the other inhabitants, such as fairies, Indians, pirates, and the wild animals, with lots of food and shelter. There is no evidence of civic or urban space on Neverland and no adult ever obliges Peter Pan and the boys to go to school or tells them to go to bed early. Moreover, the significance of nature is conveyed through the juxtaposition of the natural setting of Neverland and the civic urban space, the city of Victorian London. Therefore, the situation on Neverland can be interpreted as a reference to Pan's original residence in the utopia-like Arcadia.

However, on closer consideration, this seemingly utopian setting reveals some fractures, as Peter Pan's arrival on Neverland entails a permanent circle of aggressive activity. He and his comrades must always be on the alert in order to avoid being caught by the pirates, who in turn are stalked by the Red Indians. The Red Indians, on the other hand, have to be cautious of the wild animals, while these are tracked by Peter Pan and the boys. This circle of mutual pursuit reveals that nature is not as friendly as it seems to be, as it is depicted as a perpetual threat. Peter Pan is the only character who full-heartedly enjoys this situation, always on the lookout for adventure and danger.

His close connection with Pan is evident in the animalistic language which exemplifies the link between Peter Pan and nature. For instance, Peter "gnashed" (77) his teeth at Mrs. Darling and he describes himself as "a little bird that has broken out of the egg" (203). The use of these metaphors and other expressions again highlight the uncontrollable elements within nature while likewise referring to Pan's original existence as half human, half goat. Moreover, Neverland and nature's dominance on the island tease out the more savage

⁷ In the Disney movie of 1953 Peter Pan wears a green suit as a reference to this topic. See Bramwell (2009, 40).

characteristics of the Darling children as they roam the landscape with the Lost Boys, gradually forgetting about their bourgeois origins and turning into “wild” beings. In contrast, London is the setting to which the Darling children finally return to become more civilized and mature, thus leaving the animalistic aspects of their childhood in Neverland behind.

Aside from nature, another characteristic that is distinct to Pan is his sexual power. Barrie has adapted this trait in order to highlight the sexual awakening of the child characters, with an emphasis on Wendy. Peter is in a static state, as he describes himself as the “boy who would not grow up”, expressing his desire to always remain attached to a stage of childhood which is characterized by innocence, playfulness, and leisure time. While his own sexual identity is never able to evolve, as is apparent in his ignorance of the difference between a thimble and a kiss, his presence awakens Wendy’s sexual identity (cf. Morse 2006, 281–302). While Peter Pan wants her to be his and the Lost Boys’ mother, she continuously aspires to become his spouse. Although she finally accepts the maternal role, she carries on showing a deep affection for Peter Pan, even though the latter coolly repels her advances, which results in the lack of his own sexual growth. This situation does not hinder Peter Pan from regularly picking up Wendy for the “spring cleaning”,⁸ until Wendy becomes a mother herself. When Peter emerges again after a break of several years, she feels torn between, on the one hand, the desire to become a little girl once again in order to accompany him to Neverland and, on the other hand, the acceptance of her present role as a wife and a mother. Moreover, Peter Pan is unaware of the seductive influence he has over Wendy or any other women, including the fairy Tinkerbell and Mrs. Darling, who experiences a sublime attraction to Peter when she meets him in the nursery.

In this regard, Holly Blackford suggests that Peter uses his eternal youth in a malicious way, “luring” the children to follow him to Neverland. The sexual attraction of Peter Pan is not limited to Wendy and Mrs. Darling, as this attraction continues through Wendy’s daughter Jane and later on Jane’s daughter and all female offspring of the Darling family to come (cf. Blackford 2013, 177–198).⁹ The ambivalent impact of Peter Pan on Jane’s initiation is clearly expressed when the narrator describes her abduction to Neverland as a “tragedy” (223). Wendy’s initial reluctance in allowing Jane to accompany Peter Pan conveys the adult perspective of the unwillingness to permit a child to develop a sexual identity.

⁸ The spring cleaning could be interpreted as allusion to sexual awakening, since spring is related to nature’s rebirth, in contrast to Hades’ rape of Persephone followed by winter. I thank Katarzyna Marciniak for pointing out this significant reference.

⁹ One might suspect that the family name of Darling is not accidental: it is a term of affection used by lovers as well as by family members, thus emphasizing the close connection between emotional attachment, parental care, and love.

Another notable aspect of the Pan figure is its ability to create a panic. Peter Pan is the perfect example as he unleashes chaos and anxiety by kidnapping the Darling children, thus causing a panic within the Darling household. This disturbance in the narrative is exemplified by the rhetorical language Barrie uses in the chapter "Come away, Come away!": "Will they reach the nursery on time? If so, how delightful for them, and we shall all breathe a sigh of relief, but there will be no story" (101). By making the readers aware of this panic, they feel exhilarated by the disarray that Peter Pan causes. His act of taking the children to Neverland results in a home that is falling apart. More specifically, Peter Pan creates turmoil in the adult characters, the first being Mrs. Darling. She has lost her children and feels anxious that she will never see them again. Besides the fear of having perhaps lost her children forever, Mrs. Darling's panic also seems to be connected with the sexual attraction aroused by Peter Pan.

During a previous conversation with Wendy, Mrs. Darling admits to having heard the name of Peter Pan before, although she claims not to be able to remember the context any more. The final encounter of Wendy with Pan may provide a clue in this respect: from the inherent information that Peter Pan will abduct all young girls of the Darling family for the spring cleaning, readers might presume that this once also happened with Mrs. Darling when she was a young girl. Like Wendy, Mrs. Darling finally turned her back on Neverland and married a clerk and businessman, thus exchanging uncertainty and excitement for security and boredom. The unexpected meeting with Peter Pan reveals his still smouldering power over Mrs. Darling, who is torn between attraction and rejection. Although she initially gains power over Peter Pan by locking up his shadow, she is finally outsmarted by Peter Pan's clever ruse. Peter's demeanour towards Mrs. Darling as well as the Darling children and the Lost Boys is quite disconcerting, since he does not show any concern for their well-being. He even seems to calculatingly toy with their feelings, exploiting them to augment his own pleasure. Here Peter Pan manifests the devilish traits of the Greek god Pan, which have determined the reception of the Pan figure since the Middle Ages.¹⁰

Peter also causes an almost irrational panic in his antagonist, Hook, as seen in the statement: "There was something about Peter which goaded the pirate captain into a frenzy" (176). This frenzy is connected to Hook's obsession with killing Peter Pan. It is not fortuitous that Peter Pan's main adversary is a pirate, considering the legend that the death of the god Pan was announced by a sailor. For Hook, Peter Pan is a threat to his adult authority and power within Neverland, which is symbolized by Hook's humiliation when Peter Pan cuts off his hand. Moreover, Hook's anxiety also derives from Peter Pan's literal symbolism of eternal youth, as Hook desperately asks: "Pan, who and what art thou?" (203), to

¹⁰ While this allusion is not directly expressed in the novel, it can be inferred from the Disney film, in which Peter Pan wears a green hat with a large red feather, the familiar symbol of the devil.

which Peter replies: “I’m youth, I’m joy” (203).¹¹ Peter Pan is the literal embodiment of eternal youth and immortality that Hook can never achieve. By conquering Peter Pan, he desperately hopes to defeat both time and youth. However, Hook fails miserably and this is perhaps a bittersweet reminder to the readers that they can never remain in an eternal state of youth. As the narrative expresses, “[a]ll children, except one, must grow up” (70).

Like the god Pan, Peter Pan is distinguished by cockiness to the extent of causing mayhem and confusion. Driven by antisocial impulses, he rejoices in dangerous situations and does not shy away from killing the pirates, which is disturbingly commented upon with the statement: “I forget them after I kill them” (161). His lack of empathy puts Peter Pan on the same level as the god Pan. In contrast to the Edwardian ideal of the calm and rural Pan, Peter Pan exhibits the wild and harsh sides of the ancient god.¹² What particularly comes to the fore is Peter Pan’s unreliability. He does not seem to care much about the truth, as is for instance evident when it comes to his origin. The same applies to his promise to the Darling children that they can return to London whenever they wish to do so. In fact, he lures them to Neverland with the intention of chaining them forever to his own destiny. Although some events indicate that he is not as careless and insensitive as he claims to be – at times he is tortured by nightmares (81) and he even cries, albeit unconsciously – these occurrences do not subdue his callous demeanour.

As this overview demonstrates, Peter Pan displays several traits which connect him with the god Pan: apart from the name and the attribute of the pipe, he has a close connection to nature, roams with his comrades through the wilderness, fascinates animals as well as humans with the tunes played on his pipe, scares female characters, thus contributing to their sexual identity, is able to cause a panic, and shows antisocial drives, that is, he refuses to accept responsibility and is unreliable. Like the god Pan, he is immortal and does not grow older, therefore Peter Pan remains in a stage of eternal childhood. However, the lore of the “death of the Great Pan” indirectly refers to Peter’s potential mortality, which he attempts to overcome by refusing to accept responsibility for himself and others and taking refuge in Neverland, the cycle of life which infinitely spins round without any visible changes to its inhabitants.

¹¹ Interestingly, in this final battle Hook addresses Peter Pan in the dialogue twice as “Pan” without the proper name of “Peter”, thus stressing the panic Peter Pan arouses – which is a clear reference to the Greek god.

¹² Karen Coats (2006, 16) interprets Peter Pan as a parody of the god Pan. This only holds true if one focuses on the contemporary tradition, which regarded Pan as a symbol of calm nature and peace.

Peter Pan and the Romantic Idea of the “Strange Child”

Despite all this, the phrase “the boy who would not grow up” indicates that Peter Pan may be able to mature, since the verb “would” implies – in contrast to “could” – that growing up like a normal child is not totally beyond the bounds of possibility as is evident in the suggestion of Mrs. Darling that Peter stay with the Lost Boys in the Darling home. While the Lost Boys wholeheartedly agree to become members of the Darling household, Peter Pan resists this offer, since it implies that he would have to go to school and become a responsible adult in the long run. Consequently, he returns to Neverland without his companions, leading a solitary life among the wild animals, the Red Indians, the fairies, and the pirates, completely deprived of any child companions.

Considering this, Peter Pan’s decision to be a child forever reveals a tragic undertone, because it leads to his isolation. While all children grow up, he is somewhat frozen in a stage of “eternal childhood”.¹³ This “tragic ambiguity” – as Sarah Gilead (1991, 285) puts it – is not inherent in the Pan motif, but rather it refers to another tradition, that is, the Romantic concept of the “strange child” as it was developed by the German author E. T. A. Hoffmann in his seminal fairy tale for children, *Das fremde Kind*, in 1817.

In this fairy tale, two siblings, a girl called Christlieb and a boy called Felix, who are descended from an impoverished aristocratic family, come in contact with the title character in the nearby woods. The strange child has magical powers, since it is able to fly and understands the language of nature. The siblings and the strange child meet several times in the woods, playing happily together. However, the parents of the children have engaged a private tutor, Magister Tinte (Master Ink), who turns out to be the dwarf king Pepser. He is the enemy of the fairies and stalks the strange child, who is finally forced to leave the siblings forever. Their father succeeds in chasing Magister Tinte, aka Pepser, away, but thereupon falls ill and dies a short time later. As a consequence, the children and their mother have to abandon their home. Before starting into an uncertain future, the siblings meet the strange child for the last time, whereby it promises to reappear in their dreams whenever they need solace.

Although this fairy tale is not as prominent as Hoffmann’s *Nußknacker und Mausekönig* [Nutcracker and the Mouse King, 1816],¹⁴ it introduces a new concept of childhood into children’s literature, most often referred to as the motif of the “strange child” (cf. Richter 1987). The strange child is unusual in several respects: it has a mysterious family background, it is an orphan, and it feels quite lonely, since it has no playmates. As for its appearance, it resembles a Romantic

¹³ Holly Blackford (2013) compares Peter Pan with Oscar Wilde’s *Dorian Gray* (1891), since both characters are driven by the desire to be young forever. Jean Perrot (1992) refers to the topic of *puer aeternus*, which dates from Classical Antiquity and reappears in fin-de-siècle literature and arts. See also Alison B. Kavey (2008, 84).

¹⁴ On the international reception of this fairy tale see Kümmerling-Meibauer (2014).

genius figure, which is emphasized by its voice that resounds like music, by its capability to understand the language of nature, and by its ability to fly. Further clues involve the particular details concerning its age and name. The strange child has no proper name. As it originates from a fairy queen, it is even immortal and ageless. In addition, there is a contrast between the strange child's sanctuary – the woods – and the distant hostile world, dominated by adult authority and civilization, which both threaten the strange child's abode.

The contrast between education and play is also characteristic of this motif. The strange child never goes to school, claiming that nature is a better schoolmaster than the mechanical learning at school, which suppresses the child's imagination – just as the new tutor quells the siblings' longing for play and leisure time, but also threatens to expel the strange child from its sanctuary. In this way, the strange child is on a collision course with society's rules.

Hoffmann's fairy tale is based on the opposition between childhood and adulthood, which determines the relationship between the strange child and its playmates. They first meet when the latter are bored and long for a friend to experience new adventures. However, one interesting aspect of the strange child is the observation that it embodies ambiguous gender roles or may be perceived differently in terms of its sex by other characters. The naming and first descriptions highlight the strange child's gender neutrality. However, the girl and the boy obviously perceive it in different ways. Whereas Felix portrays it as a boy, Christlieb depicts it as a girl. Through the siblings' gender perspectives, the supposed bisexuality of the strange child is disclosed. It is interesting to note that neither the neutral term "child" nor the contradictory gender perspectives are denied by the strange child. While the siblings are determined by their gender, the strange child transgresses the borders marked by gender. Seen from this angle, the strange child's gender neutrality appears to embody a romantic ideal of childhood, which leads to a reversal of the binary gender pattern (cf. Kümmerling-Meibauer 2008). Moreover, the encounter with the strange child contributes to the siblings' gradual identification with their gender roles.

Finally, the main characteristic feature of the strange child consists in its inability to grow up. Whereas the playmates cross the threshold of adulthood, the strange child's inability to grow up involves an increasing detachment from the siblings, which ultimately leads to a final separation. At least the siblings know that they are able to recall the strange child in dreams, but the estrangement from the strange child is not lessened due to the latter's immortality.

Since its first appearance in Hoffmann's fairy tale, the motif of the "strange child" has repeatedly been taken up in Romantic children's literature and beyond. The legacy of this specific romantic concept of childhood is discernible in international children's literature almost up to the present and testifies to the

never-ending fascination of children's book authors with this topic.¹⁵ In light of this reception, Barrie's novel plays an essential role as the motif of the "strange child" has been significantly changed with regard to the issues of immortality and the related refusal to grow up.

Before focusing on this matter, however, the commonalities between the strange child and Peter Pan will be emphasized, thus drawing a line from Hoffmann's romantic childhood image to Barrie's conceptualization of the main character (cf. Ewers 1985). Almost all features that distinguish Hoffmann's strange child can be transferred to Peter Pan. He looks back on a mysterious origin. Moreover, he can fly and communicate with animals. He lives in a secluded sanctuary, on the island of Neverland, which generally cannot be accessed by adults. Neverland is also positioned as a contrasting model to the civilized world of London. Peter Pan has never gone to school and refuses to learn to read and write. His adversary is Captain Hook, a former teacher (*sic!*). He develops a close relationship with siblings of different sexes. In contrast to the strange child, he has a proper name and an unequivocal gender attribution, but on closer consideration Peter Pan is rather portrayed as an androgynous boy, who is capable of swiftly swaying between different gender roles (cf. Wasinger 2006, 225). As in Hoffmann's fairy tale, Peter Pan meets children of different sexes, whereby his main contacts are the girl Wendy and her elder brother John. Their stay on Neverland contributes to the siblings' gender awareness, while Peter Pan refuses potential gender roles, whether son, father, or husband. Finally, he is ageless – in *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* he is only one week old (12), while his exact age in *Peter and Wendy* is never mentioned – and apparently immortal, since he does not grow old and even outlives several human generations. However, in contrast to the strange child in Hoffmann's fairy tale, Peter Pan has had a choice, since he was offered the opportunity to return to his maternal home, which he rejected, as well as the invitation of Mrs. Darling to join her family as a new member. In this regard, Peter Pan's character is rather dismaying, since he does not seem to be fully aware of the consequences of his decision, which leads to his solitude.

¹⁵ See Kümmerling-Meibauer (2003, 2008) for an overview of the impact of Hoffmann's fairy tale on European as well as non-European children's literature. Prominent examples are Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince* [The Little Prince, 1943], Astrid Lindgren's *Pippi Långstrump* [Pippi Longstocking, 1945], Michael Ende's *Momo* (1973), Jostein Gaarder's *Sofies verden* [Sophie's World, 1991], and David Almond's *Skellig* (1998).

The Ambiguity of Peter Pan: Blending References to Classical Antiquity and Romanticism

As an amalgamation of characteristics of different species (bird, human being, god), Peter Pan does not fit into existing categories. He seems to stand at the threshold between the real and the imaginative realms, which is exemplarily represented in Neverland as a space that connects both. While the novel explicitly maintains that Neverland is totally dependent on Peter Pan's existence, since he is the only one who can keep this place alive, there are other passages in which the narrator argues that all children have Neverlands of their own. This surprising statement reveals that the permanently changing landscape of Neverland is an output of children's imaginative power. The same criterion seems applicable to Peter Pan, whose inconsistent personality and gender blending offers a perfect opportunity to create one's own individual image of this character. It is interesting to note how these characteristics, and the Pan figure as a whole, often reflect crucial topics and anxieties relating to the growth and development of children.

While children have to accept that they will mature and grow up without any chance to stay in a fixed state of childhood forever, Peter Pan represents exactly the contrary model: he exemplifies the "eternal child" who will never change. As an assemblage of the characteristics of the god Pan and the romantic concept of the "strange child", Peter Pan represents a fascinating character who is not easy to grasp. In view of this, Peter's unpredictable behaviour gives readers and academics some food for thought. Depending on the situation and his own feelings he shifts between friendliness, indifference, and hostility even towards the same people. This demeanour characterizes Peter as a more sinister and ambivalent figure. This comes to the forefront when he rejoices in danger, although this threatens his and the children's lives. Apart from his callousness and thoughtlessness, Peter shows another disturbing property: he is careless to the world around him to the extent that he even forgets Wendy and her brothers on their way to Neverland, thus putting them in danger of getting lost forever. Peter's incapacity to remember seems to be all-encompassing, since he maintains that he does not know anything about his earlier childhood. As the text states, he does not even know who he is, although he seems to retain some shards of memory of once having been human. Since Peter Pan permanently forgets the past, he is caught in an eternal present, which is expressed in the proliferation of the continual cycle of Peter's "mothers" over the generations (cf. Nikolajeva 2000, 91).

Quite surprisingly, the Darling children are increasingly affected by Peter's state of mind, because they start forgetting about their former life in London and have difficulties remembering the faces of their parents to the point that Michael, the youngest brother, believes that Wendy is his mother and muses about his relationship to Mrs. Darling when they finally return to London.

The lack of memory goes hand in hand with Peter's vehement rejection of learning to read and write or anything that is related to "serious things". He stubbornly insists on being a child forever, thus refusing to grow up and mature – which is metaphorically expressed in his firm refusal to grow a beard. In this connection, Peter confesses that he cannot distinguish between imagination and reality or truth. He does not care much about truthfulness and changes his mind whenever necessary or convenient. These habits reveal Peter's difficult character, which arouse ambivalent feelings on the part of the reader.

Prima facie, being a child forever and enjoying a life full of adventures is supposed to be an attractive perspective, particularly for a child audience. However, on closer consideration, this is only achieved at the expense of not having two distinct human capacities, namely feeling empathy for other people and the ability to remember, which is closely connected to having a sense of time. According to studies in developmental psychology, both capacities are not innate but are acquired during early childhood in a basic sense and develop further during adolescence and beyond (cf. Hastings, Zahn-Waxler, and McShane 2006; Thompson et al. 2014). Considering the fact that Peter Pan seems to be entrapped in a stage of early infancy, it is no wonder, then, that he has not acquired these abilities in any sense. For older and potentially advanced child readers, this entails the possible consequence that they may refrain from explicitly identifying with the main character, instead conceivably deciding to take on the perspective of Wendy and/or John, since these characters are able to change and to grow up as all children do.

To conclude, the Peter Pan figure in Barrie's novel reveals a complexity which is achieved through references to Classical Antiquity as well as romantic conceptualizations of childhood with an emphasis on the crucial motif of the strange child. By taking into account these multiple issues, readers may get an idea of the novel's inherent image of childhood but also understand why Barrie presumably struggled throughout his life with this reckless child character. Nonetheless, it should also be clear that the Peter Pan figure has been essential in highlighting key ideas of childhood and, most importantly, the anxieties of youth, time, and sexual identity.

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EDITH HALL

Cheiron as Youth Author: Ancient Example, Modern Responses

The centaur was ubiquitous in the art and literature of ancient Greece and Rome, and remains one of the most widely recognized of mythical human-animal hybrid beasts today. There have been several fine studies of the centaur from the perspective of classical philology.¹ It is often lamented, for example, that we have lost access to a notorious fourth-century-BCE short “rhapsody” entitled *Centaur* by Chaeremon, which was not in the rhapsodes’ usual uniform hexameters. It married form to content by using a hybrid mix of metres to portray the horse-human hybrid creature.² It has also been noted that the centaur is perhaps the most familiar of all ancient mythical beings in contemporary culture (Lawrence 1994, 57–68). At a metaphorical level the mythical centaur frames, for example, the difficult father–son relationship and the pedagogical challenges faced by the schoolteacher protagonist in John Updike’s celebrated novel of provincial North American life, *The Centaur* (1963).³ But centaurs have been most conspicuous in fiction and films aimed at children and young adults. The aim of this essay is to build on previous work, especially a fine study by Lisa Maurice (2015), on the function of centaurs in some bestselling modern literature for young people. It is written in the hope that it may stimulate innovative new ways of presenting centaurs in literature for the young, since it argues that their functions have been sadly limited, at least in mainstream western authors, given the richness of the potential presented by the material on centaurs offered by ancient sources.

¹ See above all DuBois (1982), with, e.g., Colvin (1880), Baur (1912), Bethe (1921), Schiffler (1976); Leventopoulou et al. (1997); Morawietz (2000); Padgett (2003); and Leuker (2008).

² Aristotle, *Poetics* 1447b: “[...] Χαίρημων ἐποίησε Κένταυρον μυκτὴν ῥαψωδίαν ἐξ ἀπάντων τῶν μέτρων [...]” / “[...] Chaeremon did when he wrote his rhapsody *The Centaur*, a medley of all the metres [...]”, trans. William Hamilton Fyfe in Aristotle (1932), available at *Perseus Digital Library*.

³ There is a large literature on the importance of classical texts to this novel, including Vickery (1974) and Stehlikova (1978).

From Ancient Cheiron to the Gothic Blue Centaur

It is the figure of Cheiron, the wise teacher, healer, prophet and hunter, the superintendent of the education and initiation of young male heroes in the mountains of Thessaly, which has largely dominated the reception of the ancient centaur since the mid-twentieth century. As the offspring of Cronos and the nymph or naiad Philyra (Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 1.2.4), he is contrasted with the rest of the centaurs. They are the sons of Centaurus and grandsons of Ixion, the prototypical (aspiring) rapist in Greek myth, and Nephele, the cloud-nymph whom Ixion mistook for Hera. These drunken, lecherous, unruly centaurs, related to the ancient Greek perception that horses were the most highly sexed of animals (e.g., Aristotle, *History of Animals* 17.4), who tried to abduct the Lapith women on the very day of Hippodamia's marriage to Peirithous (Homer, *Od.* 21.295–304; Pindar, *Pyth.* 2.44–48; Ovid, *Met.* 12.210–535), have been far less in evidence. Cheiron, exceptional amongst his wayward race, has certainly attracted almost all the attention in literature aimed at the young, at least since the emergence of a distinct category of “children's literature” in the late eighteenth century. In fantasy and science fiction literature aimed at adults, on the other hand, there has been a greater variety of centaur races, but they still tend towards the sympathetic end of the spectrum, “often blending knowledge with turbulence (or at least the potential for turbulence)” (Kollmann 1987, 236).⁴

The predominance of the virtuous centaur in post-Renaissance fiction has not always been the case. Take the frightening figure of the “Blue Centaur” in the “History of Princess Carpillona”, published in a collection of rather sensational fairy tales, aimed at a (young?) adult female audience, in 1794. The publisher was William Lane of the Minerva Press, known for its highly profitable business in sentimental and Gothic fiction (cf. Lane 1794, vol. I, 145–194).⁵ The plot involves the struggle for the throne of a kingdom between an ugly, deformed, and evil prince and his beautiful, virtuous, much younger half-brother. The people of the kingdom endure various ordeals until a good Amazonian fairy kills the wicked older prince and ensures that the virtuous younger one wins the hand of the fair princess Carpillona and the succession to the throne.

In the earlier part of the tale, while the Good Prince is but an infant, the story reveals close affinities with ancient Greek myth. Like Oedipus, the Good Prince is exposed as a baby. He is eventually brought up by shepherds. But this is only possible because he survives a sub-plot in which the Blue Centaur plays the leading role. This Centaur stands on the cusp between the Cheiron-benefactor

⁴ Judith J. Kollmann includes in this category the centaur or centaur-like beings in John Varley's novels: *Titan* (1980), *Wizard* (1981), and *The Centaur* (1984); James Kahn's *World Enough, and Time* (1980) and *Time's Dark Laughter* (1982); Piers Anthony's *A Spell for Chameleon* (1977), *Castle Roogna* (1979), and *Centaur Aisle* (1981); Michael Ende's *The Neverending Story* (1983). See also Swann (1966–1977).

⁵ On Minerva Press, see Blakey (1939).

and the savage, bestial opponent of the Lapiths. He appears amidst the shepherd community, in which the Good Prince has arrived as a child; he is “a man of prodigious size, the lower part of whose body was like a goat, covered with a blue shag: on his shoulders he carried a great club, and on his left-arm a buckler” (Lane 1794, 150, cf. Fig. 1). He helps them defeat their enemies, the gigantic man-eating Ogri. But in return, Minotaur-like, he demands the triennial tribute of a child to eat, until the year when the Good Prince is offered as levy, and then the Amazon fairy destroys the Blue Centaur.



Fig. 1: The Blue Centaur, illustration from William Lane, *Fairy Tales: Selected from the Best Authors*. Vol. I. London: Minerva Press, 1794, 150.

Although the literary quality of the tale is unremarkable, the role and status of the Blue Centaur is complex. He is a monster, who occasionally eats humans, but he is also able to defend them against the far more threatening Ogri, who are entirely savage and eat every human they encounter. He can also converse with the shepherds in *oratio recta*, whereas the Ogri are given no chance to express themselves except by reported violence. He is somehow connected with the initiation of heroes: it is through bravely facing and surviving the demand of the Blue Centaur that the Good Prince, when still a child, becomes fully accepted by the shepherds, amongst whom he is then enabled to grow into manhood and subsequently return to the royal family.

The story faces us with the issue of “relative” monstrosity, and this initiatory centaur is by no means at the worst end of the monster spectrum: here the text reads almost as if the author has been influenced by descriptions of different types of wild man encountered by colonial travellers in the New Worlds of the Enlightenment. The anonymous writer also gives the shepherds, debating wheth-

er to enlist the aid of the Blue Centaur, a Utilitarian conundrum directly inspired by Jeremy Bentham's axiom of 1776 that it is "the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong" (Bentham 1823, vi). The Elder of the shepherds wins the day with this argument: "What, my friends, is it not better for us to give one to preserve so many, since the Ogrî neither spare men, women, nor children; therefore let us not refute the Centaur's offer" (Lane 1794, 151). But perhaps most significant – regrettably – is the unremitting insistence of the story that ugliness and deformity are outward signs of moral depravity, especially in the figure of the hunchback Bad Prince. This implies that the readership of Minerva Press's fiction might not yet be ready even to consider a form of literature in which their own subjectivity in any way coincided with that of a being that did not conform to conventional ideas of perfect human beauty. No wonder our contemporary practitioners of Disability Studies have become so interested in the ancient Greeks' mythical bestiary (cf. ch. "Conjugations of the Grotesque" by Hume 2011, 77–114).

The Good Centaur(s)

It was from the early nineteenth century onwards that the benevolent, paternal image of the centaur began to predominate. This typology was partly inspired by attractive engravings of Cheiron waving off the Argonauts in Apollonius' *Argonautica* 1.543–548, his wife carrying Achilles in her arms and holding him up so that Peleus, departing on the Argo, could say good-bye to his little son. See, for example, the frontispiece (Fig. 2) to book 1 of *The Argonautics* of Apollonius Rhodius (αὐτὰρ ὄγ' ἐξ ὑπάτου ὄρεος κίεν ἄγχι θαλάσσης / Χείρων Φιλλυρίδης, πολὴ δ' ἐπὶ κύματος ἀγῆ / τέγγε πόδας, καὶ πολλὰ βαρεῖη χειρὶ κελεύων / νόστον ἐπευφήμησεν ἀκηδέα νισσομένοισιν. / σὺν καὶ οἱ παράκοιτις ἐπωλένιον φορέουσα / Πηλεΐδην Ἀχιλῆα, φίλῳ δειδίσκετο πατρί, 1.553–558), translated by the Irish poet William Preston and published in 1803, whose version of this passage reads thus:

And he, whom Phillira to Saturn bore,
 From steepy mountains seeks the sounding shore.
 Where the white breakers o'er the pebbles rave,
 Amid the foam advancing through the wave,
 With hands uprais'd, he hail'd the parting train,
 'Safe may ye sail, and safe return again.'
 Near him his consort Chariclo appears.
 The young Achilles in her arms she bears.
 And holds him forward, as the vessel flies,
 With one last look to glad a father's eyes. (Apollonius Rhodius 1803, vol. I, 27)



Fig. 2: Cheiron, his wife, and Achilles waving off the Argonauts – the frontispiece to book 1 of Apollonius Rhodius, *The Argonautics*, trans. William Preston. Vol. I. Dublin: Graisberry and Campbell, 1803.

The image of Cheiron as friendly carer, even of tiny infants, resulted in his appearance in frontispieces and illustrations to several Victorian and Edwardian editions of stories for children, notably Charles Kingsley's *The Heroes; or: Greek Fairy Tales for My Children*, originally published in 1855 and still in print today. Stimulated by the first part of *Story II: The Argonauts*, entitled “How the Centaur Trained the Heroes on Pelion”, illustrators from Kingsley himself onwards often chose a scene including Cheiron and a small child or children as the frontispiece to their editions. In these, Cheiron usually wields a harp, to emphasize his role as teller of tales rather than, for example, as hunter or healer. The musician singing to enraptured young heroes created a mythical mirror in which parents or nannies and their little charges could see their bedtime storytelling reflected. In the 1910 edition illustrated by George Soper, there are two such images, including one on the title page (cf. Fig. 3, next page).⁶

⁶ Many thanks to Deborah H. Roberts and Sheila Murnaghan for advice and the provision of this image. There is a chapter on the illustration history of books of stories based on classical mythology by Kingsley and Nathaniel Hawthorne in Murnaghan and Roberts (2018, 47–80), although they do not reproduce any images of centaurs.



Fig. 3: Cheiron and children, illustration by George Soper, from Charles Kingsley, *The Heroes; or: Greek Fairy Tales for My Children*, London: Headley Brothers, 1910, title page.

The benign nature of the centaur in literature for the young, imprinted on the imaginations of generations of children who had read Kingsley, was rendered more or less inevitable by the benevolence of the wise centaurs in C. S. Lewis' influential Narnia novels. This is despite the fact that they are not teachers and live apart from humans, rarely interacting with them and preferring to remain aloof, practising their esoteric arts of astronomy and medicine (Maurice 2015, 146–147). For they are always, emphatically, allied with the side of Aslan and virtue. They include Glenstorm in *Prince Caspian* (1951), the healer Cloudbirth and the two unnamed centaurs who allow Jill and Eustace to ride them in *The Silver Chair* (1953), the kindly, prophetic centaur who blessed Shasta and his brother as infants in *The Horse and His Boy* (1954), and the astronomer Roonwit in *The Last Battle* (1956).

We are kept at a distance from these austere, dignified beings, with their arcane knowledge, and we certainly are not invited to identify with their subjective experience or identity internal to their psyches. And it is this rather bland, mystical, yet kindly personalities of the Narnian Cheiron-like horse-men which largely explain the centaurs' somewhat derivative role in most subsequent fantastic "other worlds" for children and teenagers. Lewis' benevolent creatures undoubtedly lie behind the two centaurs who have dealings with humans in the Harry Potter novels, Firenze and Ronan (Maurice 2015, 148–151). Firenze teaches Divination at Hogwarts and saves Harry from an attack by Voldemort; he also has associations with Dante, the Florentine poet who in his *Inferno*, with Virgil, meets the centaurs Cheiron, Nessus, and Pholos in the seventh circle of Hell, where they help them pass the river of boiling blood and fire (Hofmann 2015,

172).⁷ An even more obvious avatar of the classical Cheiron who trains young heroes is the master educator Mr. Brunner in Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson & the Olympians*, and especially *The Lightning Thief* (2005). Mr. Brunner is Percy Jackson's Latin teacher at Yancy Academy, and turns out to be Cheiron the Centaur himself (Maurice 2015, 139–168). The centaurs of Diana Wynne Jones' *Sudden Wild Magic* (1992) and *Deep Secret* (1997), however exotic and magical, remain the friends and guardians of the humans, who are the ordeal-facing protagonists; so does the hyper-intelligent Foaly in Eoin Colfer's *Artemis Fowl* (2001–2012) series. Jones' use of centaurs does, however, enable her to address some of the ecological issues which inform her work, and this is commendable (Maurice 2015, 156–159, 165–168).

Centaur the Tutor and the Author

But a function of the centaur, or at least of Cheiron, consistently overlooked by contemporary writers is that he is the only imaginary beast in all ancient mythology who was also imagined to be an author himself – he is a mythical beast, but in Antiquity he was given full subjectivity. In the next part of this article I review the ancient evidence for two works believed to have been composed exclusively about or by this fusion of the equine and the human, the *Cheironeia* and *Precepts of Cheiron* respectively. I argue that since these poems were often associated with the maturation of boys into men, they created appropriate ancient precedents for the intense interest in centaurs exhibited in more recent fiction for the young. Cheiron is nothing less than the ancestor of founding father of all writers of fiction for and about youthful people on the verge of adulthood.⁸

Cheiron, the “wisest and most just” of his race (Homer, *Iliad* 11.831), was specifically associated with the education and edification of male children and young adults, just as Aesop seems to have been specifically associated with the instruction of much smaller children in basic literacy (Hall 2018). The archetypal expression of Cheiron as morally authoritative didactic figure, who oversees youths' education, is the proem to Xenophon's treatise *On Hunting*:

τὸ μὲν εὖρημα θεῶν, Ἀπόλλωνος καὶ Ἀρτέμιδος, ἄγραι καὶ κύνες: ἔδοσαν δὲ καὶ ἐτίμησαν τοῦτ' ἄνθρωπον διὰ δικαιοσύνην. ὁ δὲ λαβὼν ἐχάρη τῷ δώρῳ καὶ ἐχρήτο:

⁷ On centaurs in Dante and other medieval, Renaissance, and early modern sources see Kollmann (1987, 233–235); Maurice (2015, 143–146).

⁸ He may even have appeared in this role on stage, since Pollux mentions a special mask which could be worn by actors playing centaurs (*Onomasticon* 4.142); despite textual difficulties, Pollux seems to mean that this could occur in a tragedy, a comedy, or a satyr play, cf. Webster (1970, 73–96) and (1952, 150–151). One possible candidate for a play featuring Cheiron is Sophocles' satyr drama *Lovers of Achilles* (1917, 103–104); cf. also Sutton (1984, 181) and Michelakis (2002, 172–174).

καὶ ἐγένοντο αὐτῶ μαθηταὶ κυνηγεσίων τε καὶ ἐτέρων καλῶν Κέφαλος, Ἀσκληπιός, Μειλανίων, Νέστωρ, Ἀμφιάραος, Πηλεὺς, Τελαμών, Μελέαγρος, Θησεύς, Ἴππόλυτος, Παλαμήδης, Μενεσθεύς, Ὀδυσσεύς, Διομήδης, Κάστωρ, Πολυδεύκης, Μαχάων, Ποδαλείριος, Ἀντίλοχος, Αἰνεΐας, Ἀχιλλεύς, ὧν κατὰ χρόνον ἕκαστος ὑπὸ θεῶν ἐτιμήθη. (1.1–2)

Hunting and hounds were the discovery of the gods, Apollo and Artemis. But they gave them as an honour to Cheiron on account of his integrity [διὰ δικαιοσύνην]. He accepted the gifts, was delighted, and put them to use. Students studied hunting and other fine things with him: Cephalus, Asclepius, Melanion, Nestor, Amphiaraus, Peleus, Telamon, Meleager, Theseus, Hippolytus, Palamedes, Menestheus, Odysseus, Diomedes, Castor and Polydeuces, Machaon, Podaleirius, Antilochus, Aeneas, Achilles: every one of these heroes was in time honoured by the gods.⁹

This is already a remarkable roll-call of heroes to be taught by a single tutor, and other ancient sources supplement it with several others: Jason, Aristaeus, Ajax, Actaeon, Caeneus, Perseus, Heracles, Oileus, Phoenix, and, in one Byzantine tradition, even Dionysus, who was said to have learned songs, dances, Bacchic rites and initiations from Cheiron (Ptolemy Hephaestion, *New History*, book 4 as summarized in Photius, *Bibl.* 190).

Xenophon, who led his own sons and those of the other local residents on a great annual hunt at the time of the festival for Artemis, on his estate at Scillus near Olympia and on Mount Pholoe (*Anabasis* 5.3.7–10), is the authorial persona in this didactic treatise. He positions himself, before his advice on hunting, as an epigone or near-equivalent of the primordial centaur who had taught youths how to hunt; his readers are invited to imagine themselves in the role of the exemplary “initiation” heroes such as Peleus and Achilles. He concludes the proem with explicit advice to youths who are reading him:

ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν παραινῶ τοῖς νέοις μὴ καταφρονεῖν κυνηγεσίων μηδὲ τῆς ἄλλης παιδείας: ἐκ τούτων γὰρ γίνονται τὰ εἰς τὸν πόλεμον ἀγαθοὶ καὶ εἰς τὰ ἄλλα ἐξ ὧν ἀνάγκη καλῶς νοεῖν καὶ λέγειν καὶ πράττειν. (1.18)

For my part, then, my advice to the young [ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν παραινῶ τοῖς νέοις] is, do not despise hunting or the other training of your boyhood, if you desire to grow up to be good men, good not only in war but in all else of which the issue is perfection in thought, word, and deed.

From the perspective of the history of literature for children and young adults, the loss of the archaic *Cheironeia*, which I suspect was an important undertext to Xenophon’s treatise, is particularly regrettable. This poem may have played a crucial role in the thought-world of maturing ancient Greek boys. A copy of the

⁹ *On Hunting* quoted in trans. by E. H.

Cheironeia inscribed on a papyrus roll is actually being read by a boy, under the enthusiastic supervision of a man leaning on a cane who seems to be his tutor, depicted on an early fifth-century red-figure kyathos (Berlin 2322, cf. Fig. 4).

The vase-painting tells us that the boy, called Panaitios, is beautiful (*καλός*) and that the poem, which has been removed from the box which now lies on the table, is the *CHEIRONEIA* and is also beautiful (*καλή*). The poem was clearly one which contributed to the forging of relationships between children and their tutors. But kyathoi were used to ladle wine from the main bowl into cups at the symposium, where older men trained youths in correct drinking mores, along with polite social and erotic conduct. The youth and the poem which was also part of his training for adulthood are both fit subjects to be celebrated for their beauty at such a drinking party, and of course centaurs, since they enjoy wine, are a suitable choice for that reason too.



Fig. 4: Panaitios Painter (Onesimos), red-figure kyathos with a *Cheironeia*-reading scene, fifth century BCE, No. F 2322, phot. Johannes Laurentius, via Europeana Collections, © Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

What verses were the boy on the vase actually assumed to be reading? The relationship between the *Cheironeia* and the other named Cheiron-dominated poem, *The Precepts of Cheiron*, is not clear. Were the precepts embedded within the *Cheironeia* or did they constitute a completely different text? *The Precepts of Cheiron* were admonitory verses, in Cheiron's first-person voice, addressed to a junior male listener, as Hesiod's *Works and Days* is addressed to Perses (10) and Theognis' admonitory elegiacs are addressed to Kyrnos (19, 28, 39, 43). The *Suda* describes Cheiron, apparently without scepticism, as an author, in these terms:

Χείρων, Κένταυρος: ὃς πρῶτος εὔρεν ἰατρικὴν διὰ βοτανῶν: Ὑποθήκας δι' ἐπῶν, ἃς ποιεῖται πρὸς Ἀχιλλεῖα: καὶ Ἱππιατρικόν: διὸ καὶ Κένταυρος ὀνομάσθη. (Suda χ 267 = T 71)

Cheiron, a centaur, who was the first to discover medicine by means of herbs. He wrote *Precepts* in epic verses which are addressed to Achilles; and also *Veterinary Medicine*. For this reason, he was also called Centaur.¹⁰

The centaur who wrote the precepts addressed to Achilles was so famous that he could simply be referred to as “Centaur”, just as Polyphemus, the most well-known of the Cyclopes, was also sometimes called simply “Cyclops”. Cheiron was also credited with writing about horse medicine (which might be suggestive in terms of encouraging young people to train as veterinarian scientists, or at least to be kind to animals). We also know the opening lines of Cheiron’s *Precepts* from a scholion on Pindar’s *Pythian Ode* 6.22:

τὰς δὲ Χείρωνος ὑποθήκας Ἡσιόδῳ ἀνατιθέασιν, ὃν ἡ ἀρχή: (Hesiod frg. 218)
 “Ἐὺ νῦν μοι τάδ’ ἕκαστα μετὰ φρεσὶ πευκαλίμησι
 φράζεσθαι: πρῶτον μὲν, ὄτ’ ἂν δόμον εἰσαφίκηαι,
 ἔρδειν ἱερά κατὰ θεοῖς αἰγιγενέτησιν.”

They attribute to Hesiod *The Precepts of Cheiron*, which begins thus: (Hesiod frg. 218)

“So note all these things well to endow your mind with prudence;
 First, whenever you return home,
 Perform a fair sacrifice to the gods who live forever.”¹¹

Cheiron here recommends traditional piety, with no particular reference to the youth of his listener(s). The text in question is the *Precepts of Cheiron*, his *Hypothēkai* (αἱ Χείρωνος ὑποθήκαι), an archaic hexameter poem.

It is not difficult to see why *The Precepts of Cheiron* were attributed to Hesiod, by far the best-known compiler of nouthetic material in hexameter *epē*. We can see the process of attribution at work in the discussion of the extent of Hesiod’s *œuvre* in Pausanias’ *Description of Greece*:

Βοιωτῶν δὲ οἱ περὶ τὸν Ἐλικῶνα οἰκοῦντες παρειλημμένα δόξη λέγουσιν ὡς ἄλλο Ἡσιόδος ποιήσειεν οὐδὲν ἢ τὰ Ἔργα: καὶ τούτων δὲ τὸ ἐς τὰς Μούσας ἀφαιροῦσι προοίμιον, ἀρχὴν τῆς ποιήσεως εἶναι τὸ ἐς τὰς Ἐριδας λέγοντες: καὶ μοι μόλυβδον ἐδεικνυσαν, ἔνθα ἡ πηγὴ, τὰ πολλὰ ὑπὸ τοῦ χρόνου λελυμασμένον: ἐγγέγραπται δὲ αὐτῷ τὰ Ἔργα. ἔστι δὲ καὶ ἕτερα κεχωρισμένη τῆς προτέρας, ὡς πολὺν τινα ἐπῶν ὁ Ἡσιόδος ἀριθμὸν ποιήσειεν, ἐς γυναϊκάς τε ἄδόμενα καὶ ἄς μεγάλας ἐπονομάζουσιν Ἥοίας, καὶ Θεογονίαν τε καὶ ἐς τὸν μάντιν Μελάμποδα,

¹⁰ Trans. Glenn W. Most in Hesiod (2007, 207) and E. H.

¹¹ Trans. Glenn W. Most in Hesiod (2007, 207) and E. H.

καὶ ὡς Θησεύς ἐς τὸν Ἄϊδην ὁμοῦ Πειρίθῳ καταβαίη παρανέσεις τε Χίρωνος ἐπὶ διδασκαλία δὴ τῆ Ἀχιλλέως, καὶ ὅσα ἐπὶ Ἔργοις τε καὶ Ἡμέραις. (Paus. 9.31.4–5 = T 42 Most)

The Boeotians who live around Helicon say that, of the poems commonly ascribed to him, Hesiod composed nothing but the *Works*. And from this poem they remove the proem to the Muses, saying that it begins with the lines about the Strifes [i.e. line 11]. And, where the fountain is, they showed me a lead tablet, very much damaged by the passage of time. On it was written the *Works*. But there is another opinion, different from the first one, according to which Hesiod composed a very great number of epic poems: the poem about women; and what they call the *Great Ehoiai*; the *Theogony*; the poem about the seer Melampous; the one about Theseus' descent into Hades together with Peirithous; and *Cheiron's Counsels for Teaching Achilles* and everything that follows after the *Works and Days*.¹²

Pausanias describes *Cheiron's Counsels* (although note the slightly different title, *παρανέσεις* rather than *ὑποθήκαι*), whether or not they were the work of Hesiod, specifically as “the ones for teaching Achilles”. This implies that there were other texts containing precepts, or even precepts aimed at other mythical heroes, from which Pausanias wants to distinguish this particular poem. Of course, if all the precepts in Cheiron's voice were addressed specifically to the young Achilles, every time a boy like the one on the Berlin kyathos read them aloud, he was placing himself in the very sandals of the great warrior Achilles himself, listening to the renowned Centaur, and identifying with the young hero as he absorbed the initiatory wisdom.

On the other hand, some of the precepts may have been addressed more with educators than pupils in mind, for example this one cited by Quintilian:

quidam litteris instituendos, qui minores septem annis essent, non putaverunt, quod illa primum aetas et intellectum disciplinarum capere et laborem pati posset. in qua sententia Hesiodum esse plurimi tradunt qui ante grammaticum Aristophanen fuerunt; nam is primus ὑποθήκας, in quo libro scriptum hoc invenitur, negavit esse huius poetæ. (*Inst.* 1.1.15 = T 220 Most)

Some consider that children under the age of seven should not receive a literary education, that being the earliest age at which they can gain intellectually through study instruction and cope with the effort to learn. That Hesiod was of this opinion very many writers affirm who were earlier than the critic Aristophanes; for he was the first [“is primus” (Aristoph. Byzantinus)] to reject the *Precepts*

¹² Trans. Glenn W. Most in Hesiod (2007, 189).

[ὕποθήκας], in which book this maxim occurs, as a work of that poet [“negavit esse huius poetae”].¹³

Of course, when citing this sensible piece of advice, Quintilian does not explicitly say that by *Precepts* he means the poem known as *The Precepts of Chiron*, but the focus on the age at which children start to learn to read makes a Cheironic context look probable.

One further fragment expressing popular wisdom, quoted by Plutarch, which has been thought to belong to *The Precepts of Cheiron* is, however, not spoken in the Centaur’s voice. This *may* mean that if the narrative *Cheironeia* was a separate work it is the more likely source. The passage concerns “daimones”, and in particular the fact that even these semi-supernatural beings die; it is attributed to Hesiod in Plutarch’s *De defectu oraculorum*. Plutarch tells us that these lines are spoken “in the persona of the Naiad”:

έννέα τοι ζώει γενεὰς λακέρυζα κορώνη,
 ἀνδρῶν ἡβώντων ἔλαφος δέ τε τετρακόρωνος
 τρεῖς δ’ ἔλάφους ὁ κόραξ γηράσκεται αὐτὰρ ὁ φοῖνιξ
 έννέα τοὺς κόρακας· δέκα δ’ ἡμεῖς τοὺς φοῖνικας
 νύμφαι ἐυπλόκαμοι, κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο. (2.415c–d = T 42 Most)

A chattering crow lives out nine generations of aged men, but a stag’s life is four times a crow’s, and a raven’s life makes three stags old, while the phoenix outlives nine ravens, but we, the rich-haired Nymphs, daughters of Zeus the aegis-holder, outlive ten phoenixes.¹⁴

The attribution to one of the archaic Cheiron poems looks plausible, since Cheiron was traditionally married to a naiad, sometimes named Chariclo and sometimes simply “the Naiad”, and since his own extended but ultimately limited lifespan, when he chose death despite having the inborn right to immortality, was a major focus of discussions of Cheiron in ancient sources (cf., e.g., Pindar, *Pyth.* 3.1–11). This topic is even covered in the proem to Xenophon’s *On Hunting* immediately after the passage quoted above:

θαυμαζέτω δὲ μηδεὶς ὅτι οἱ πολλοὶ αὐτῶν ἀρέσκοντες θεοῖς ὁμῶς ἐτελεύτησαν· τοῦτο μὲν γὰρ ἢ φύσις· ἀλλ’ οἱ ἔπαινοι αὐτῶν μεγάλοι ἐγένοντο· μηδὲ ὅτι οὐχ αἱ αὐταὶ ἡλικίαι πᾶσι τούτοις· ὁ γὰρ Χείρωνος βίος πᾶσιν ἐξήρκει. Ζεὺς γὰρ καὶ Χείρων ἀδελφοὶ πατὴρ δὲ τοῦ αὐτοῦ, μητρὸς δὲ ὁ μὲν Ἴρεας, ὁ δὲ Ναῖδος νύμφης· ὥστε ἐγγόνει μὲν Χείρων πρότερος τούτων, ἐτελεύτησε δὲ ὕστερος, ἐπεὶ Ἀχιλλεὺς ἐπαίδευσεν. (1.3–4)

¹³ Trans. Glenn W. Most in Hesiod (2007, 207) and Hugh G. Evelyn-White (adapted) in Hesiod (1998, 75).

¹⁴ Trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White in Hesiod (1998, 75).

Nobody should be surprised that most of these men, although gratifying to the gods, died nonetheless. That's nature for you. But the praise of them has increased – not that they were all alive at the same time. The lifespan of Cheiron was sufficient for all of them. For Zeus and Cheiron were brothers. They had the same father, but different mothers. Zeus' mother was Rhea, and Cheiron's was Nais the nymph. That is why, although he was born earlier than all of them, he died last, since he taught Achilles.

Xenophon is not interested here in the important aspect of Cheiron's mortality that he had actually chosen it over the alternative of an immortal life filled with pain, although this is in itself a topic in the ancient literature on Cheiron full of promise for exploring in stories for children and young adults. His concern is to explain how one individual could possibly have lived long enough to educate so many heroes for years at a time.

The title of the *Cheironeia* as initiatory poem for teenage boys implies an epic narrating the deeds of Cheiron. As such it is already unusual: few ancient poems seem to have been entirely devoted to a mythical beast. Exceptions are the monodic/citharodic dithyrambs by Timotheus and Philoxenus of Cythera, dating from the late fifth and early fourth centuries BCE and edited with translation by David A. Campbell (1993). Timotheus seems to have specialized in giving voice to both beasts and humans under duress, such as Semele in labour or the drowning barbarian in *Persians* (Hall 2006, 93); his *Scylla* was criticized by Aristotle (*Poetics* 15.1454a28, 26.1461b30; Page 1967, 793). Both Timotheus and Philoxenus wrote poems entitled *Cyclops*, which seem to have rehabilitated Polyphemus (see Aristotle, *Poetics* 2.1448a9–18), and turned him into a sympathetic figure who expressed his own subjectivity – in Philoxenus' poem, indeed, his love for Galatea (Page 1967, 815–824; Hordern 1999). But as far as we know neither poet discussed Cheiron.

Since the *Cheironeia* is attested, as we have seen, as an apparent “classic” work in early fifth-century visual art, a much more significant parallel is provided by Stesichorus' *Geryoneis*, the fragments of which are widely acknowledged to belong to the most important long archaic lyric poem of which anything substantial survives before Pindar and Bacchylides.¹⁵ Stesichorus' poem told the story of the tenth labour of Heracles – obtaining the oxen of the three-headed monster Geryon from the western isle of Erytheia. It has long been noted that Stesichorus, in this poem, portrayed Geryon far more sympathetically than might be expected of an adversary of Heracles; it showed him talking to his mother, like Achilles to Thetis or Hector to Hecuba in the *Iliad*, and gave him voice, exploring his subjective viewpoint even at the moment of his expiry (cf. Stesichorus frgs. S7–S87, ed. Campbell 1991, *s.l.*; Franzen 2009, 62–70).

¹⁵ See the comprehensive edition by Curtis (2011) with the review by Finglass (2012, 354–357).

Although designed specifically for young people, and arguably being inappropriate for younger children on account of its explicit sexual content, Anne Carson's 1997 verse novel *Autobiography of Red*, inspired by and including the fragments of the *Geryoneis*, offers a superb example of the potential of retelling or adapting ancient monster myths from the viewpoint of monsters rather than of the heroes who vanquished them. Carson's Geryon is a hybrid, contrasted with the self-confident, good-looking, American human youth Heracles; her winged monster suggests that we ask whether his "physical and sexual impossibility is meant to rupture everything that seems safe and measurable" (Battis 2003, 200). It is true that Geryon, an adolescent, transcends gender in that he sometimes fails to remember whether people he has met are male or female (for example, his fellow librarians after he broken-heartedly takes a job in canto 24). One of his most endearing characteristics is a tendency to imagine himself sympathetically into the situation of females. But it is always clear that he is himself male, and that he is gay, and it is primarily as a sign of ethnic alterity that Carson's Geryon, whose red skin and wings mark him out as different, can be considered.

Although no such connection is explicitly drawn, the implicit ethnic associations of "red" skin in North American and Canadian culture lurk just beneath Carson's work surface, certainly after Geryon meets an indigenous Amerindian from Peru. He may no longer suffer from the "fear of ridicule, / to which everyday life as a winged red person had / accommodated Geryon early in life" (Carson 1998, 83), but he still does not know where he belongs. He inhabits an in-between state, of the type that has been labelled "thirdspace" by some postcolonial theorists – an ambiguous area lacking any clear coordinates. Homi K. Bhabha has called it a "disarticulated space", a realm where hybridization can occur between bipolar areas of identity (Bhabha 1990, 221; see further Hall 2009).

Carson's brilliant invention is highly suggestive for the possible use of an ancient mythical beast to address the sort of emotional and identity-related problems which beset young people during puberty, concerning body image, sexuality, ethnic identity, and confidence in the face of much more self-assured individuals. And she has succeeded in doing this by thinking about a hybrid figure who, despite Stesichorus' unusual psychological angle, has dominantly been reviled as a hybrid monstrosity in the cultural tradition. The potential here is enormous, and further suggested, as Lisa Maurice has pointed out, in *Watersmeet* (2009) and *The Centaur's Daughter* (2011) by fantasy author Ellen Jensen Abbott. Abbott delves into ideas about ethnic difference and prejudice to explore the human heroine's growing understanding that the centaurs she has so feared have been oppressed as racially different, and this is an encouraging development (Maurice 2015, 159–161).

Cheiron, on the other hand, was always the friend of human heroes, especially in their childhood and adolescence, and had a far richer life experience than Geryon. This makes it all the more surprising that he has not been used in signif-

icant literature for the young as a protagonist or first-person narrator or even protagonist. What might have been the contents of the “beautiful” poem narrating his exploits, being perused so intently by the “beautiful” youth Panaitios on the Berlin kyathos? It is true that Cheiron is rarely seen alone in ancient art, in vase-painting. He is typically shown accepting a boy, usually Achilles, as a pupil in a “first day at boarding school” kind of scenario, as on this white-ground wine-jug of the late sixth century in the British Museum (1867,0508.1009, cf. Fig. 5).



Fig. 5: Peleus bringing the infant Achilles to Cheiron, white-ground oinochoe, late black-figure style, 520–500 BCE, British Museum 1867,0508.1009, reproduced from Winifred Margaret Lambart Hutchinson, *Golden Porch: A Book of Greek Fairy Tales*, New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1914, 140, Wikimedia Commons.

It is a “boarding school” rather than a day school because Cheiron keeps his charge with him physically, and becomes in a sense his foster father; another aspect which could be highly suggestive for literature helping children to prepare emotionally for school, a type of book which I know from personal experience can be enormously helpful for a frightened youngster,¹⁶ or even deal with the acute psychological and social challenges of social care, fostering, and adoption. But other sources can help us speculate on Cheiron’s own adventures as they may have been told in the *Cheironeia*.

¹⁶ My own children were helped enormously to face their anxiety about new schools by *Billy and the Big New School* by Catherine and Laurence Anholt (1997).

Cheiron the Master of Love

He lived on Mount Pelion. Apollo and Artemis instructed him and he was celebrated for his command of hunting, music, medicine, gymnastics, and the art of prophecy. Cheiron himself was the only centaur “to settle down and produce a family” (Maurice 2015, 141): he married a naiad named Nais or Chariclo, and had children in whose own myths he was involved, including Endeïs, the mother of Peleus, and Melanippe. But his death is also an important part of his story. When Heracles was fighting the Erymanthian boar, he came into conflict with the other centaurs. They fled to Cheiron. One of Heracles’ arrows wounded Cheiron, and the incurable pain was so great that he decided to die, after an extremely long life, bestowing his immortality on Prometheus. Zeus then placed Cheiron among the stars as the constellation Centaurus.

Several of his exploits are related to his friendship with his grandson Peleus, whom he saved from the death at the hands of the other centaurs, and whom he advised on how to court, or at least exert control over Thetis. Indeed, where the other centaurs are uncouth hypersexual creatures, one exquisite text which may draw on the *Cheironeia* insists that Cheiron could even teach gods how to use persuasion rather than force when wooing a desired lover. In *Pythian* 9.18–66 we hear how the athletic Cyrene attracted Apollo’s attention when he saw her wrestling with a lion. He straightaway consults Cheiron, asking whether it is lawful (ὄσια, 36) to touch her “and to mow the honey-sweet grass of her bed” (36–37). The next lines perhaps suggest what a wonderful picture of Cheiron, as the mentor of young men during their very first sexual encounters, we may have lost along with the *Cheironeia*:

τὸν δὲ Κένταυρος ζαμενής, ἀγανᾶ χλαρὸν γελάσσαις ὄφρυϊ, μῆτιν ἔαν
εὐθὺς ἀμείβετο: ‘κρυπταὶ κλαΐδες ἐντὶ σοφᾶς Πειθοῦς ἱερᾶν φιλοτάτων,
Φοῖβε, καὶ ἔν τε θεοῖς τοῦτο κἀνθρώποις ὁμῶς
αἰδέοντ’, ἀμφανδὸν ἀδείας τυχεῖν τὸ πρῶτον εὐνᾶς.
καὶ γὰρ σέ, τὸν οὐ θεμιτὸν ψεύδει θιγεῖν,
ἔτραπε μείλιχος ὄργᾶ παρφάμεν τοῦτον λόγον.’ (38–43)

The mighty centaur, laughing gaily beneath mild brows, straightaway responded with shrewd advice: ‘Wise Persuasion’s keys to sacred loving relationships are secret, Phoebus. Both gods and humans suffer from embarrassment when they have pleasurable sexual relations publicly for the first time. Even you, to whom any form of falsehood is prohibited, have been moved by a gentle impulse to express yourself with such circumspection.’¹⁷

Cheiron then tells Apollo how he will take Cyrene to Africa and found a colony which will take her name. But the emphasis on the importance of tact in ap-

¹⁷ Trans. E. H.

proaching someone in the hopes of a sexual relationship is almost without parallel in ancient literature, and indicative of the uses to which a Cheiron-figure might be put in modern literature for teenagers.

Although we cannot be sure whether the *Cheironeia* included material from *The Precepts of Cheiron*, or whether their content partially overlapped, thinking about their subject matter suggests that modern authors of books for the young have overlooked some excellent opportunities. *The Precepts* offers us a narrator unique in ancient literature, since he was bodily not wholly human at all: it is possible that the *Centaur* of Chaeremon (fourth century BCE), with its varied metres, was in the first person and offered some account of how it felt to have both a human head and torso and an equine body, but we cannot be sure. And it was not until the nineteenth century that we can read a post-Renaissance literary author who identified himself with a centaur and wrote as narrator, in the first-person voice of this hybrid creature. The step became possible with the advent of Romanticism. In 1832, the text of Goethe's *Faust* Part 2, on which he had been working the year before, was published posthumously. In Scene 3, the famous "Klassische Walpurgisnacht", Faust is assisted on his journey along the river Peneios to Helen by Cheiron. In their extended dialogue, new perspectives are opened up on the role of this avuncular centaur in the sexual development of young men. Cheiron tells Faust, who is riding him, that Helen once sat on his back herself, and gripped his mane – Faust says explicitly that he finds this thought arousing. They discuss Helen's eternal, seductive beauty, and Faust's desire to attain her: Cheiron symbolizes restless movement but also potent masculinity (Borchardt 1972; Brude-Firnau 2011).

Macareus the Centaur

In the same decade, the somatic imagery finally became fused with a first-person Cheiron-narrator in the prose poem "The Centaur" by the short-lived French poet Maurice de Guérin (1810–1839), taking the first steps towards the Symbolism of Stéphane Mallarmé. "The Centaur", first published after de Guérin's death by George Sand,¹⁸ who rightly admired it, is quite unlike any text that precedes it. It is a highly personal, intimate, introspective meditation on memories of childhood, the physical sensations of the growing adolescent, sensual experiences of the natural world, ageing, depression, and loneliness, a cluster of perceptions unified in the subjectivity of a centaur named Macareus ["Blessed One"]. Its late Victorian English translator, the poet, playwright, and wood engraver Thomas Sturge Moore, adorned the text with three beautiful woodcuts portraying the centaur narrator and prefaced his translation with a quotation from a letter by de Guérin. This reveals the French writer's fascination with private memory, which makes him far happier than anything he experiences in the present:

¹⁸ In *Revue des deux mondes*, 15 May 1840, along with de Guérin's poem "Glaucus".

A tumult invades me, an infinite regret, an ecstasy of remembrance, recapitulations which exalt the whole past and which are richer than even the hour of happiness; indeed all that makes – what is, it would seem, a law of my nature – everything better felt as recollection than at first hand [“toutes choses mieux ressenties que senties”]. (de Guérin, 1899, 3, trans. T. S. Moore)

He wrote, at seventeen, to the Abbé Buquet, his tutor at private Catholic School in Paris, of his sadness as a child after his mother died when he was only six:

My family lived in the depths of the country and my childhood was solitary. I knew nothing of the games and romping which form a part of early experience. I was the only child in the house and when my mind had received impressions I was not able to run off and forget them in the amusements which the company of another child of my own age would have provided for me. I kept these impressions untouched, they cut themselves into my memory and were deepened with the passage of time. (Smith 1949, 19)

His loneliness continued into young adulthood, and he writes in the same depressed letter that it “has made me so shy that I have never been able, even among my school friends, to enjoy the freedom of friendship which can express its own opinion with pride and openness” (19). The Abbé was renowned for his kindness and de Guérin developed an intense emotional and spiritual bond with him which continued throughout his own short life, even though he abandoned his Christian beliefs entirely in favour of a pantheistic pagan mysticism, fed by his passion for the ancient Greek world.

There is documentary evidence that de Guérin was highly educated in classical literature (Vrančić 2015, 155–158 and 169, n. 1)¹⁹ and that he had contemplated artistic representations of centaurs in the Louvre (Decahors 1932). But his “Centaur” consists of the recollections of the centaur Macareus in extreme old age, first recalling with sensuous richness his own childhood, deep in the mountain caves:

My growing-up ran almost its entire course in that darkness – wherein I was born. Our abode at its innermost lay so far within the thickness of the mountain, that I should not have known on which side there might be an issue, if, turning astray through the entrance, the winds had not sometimes driven in thither freshets of air and sudden commotions. Also, at times, my mother returned, having about her the perfume of valleys, or streaming from waters which she frequented. (de Guérin 1899, 5–6)

Macareus recalls how it felt to be possessed of a such a strong young body, and he was “perturbed” by the force of his own powers; he recalls the sensual experiences of “knotting his arms” around “the bust of centaurs, and the bodies of

¹⁹ He even taught Greek to make a living after graduation.

heroes, and the trunks of oaks; my hands have gained experience of rocks, of waters, of the innumerable plants, and of subtlest impressions from the air"; we learn that he is in conversation with Melampus, who has come to him, the "oldest and saddest" of the centaurs. He confides to Melampus that in his old age, his hooves are quite worn away, but that his chief sensation when growing up was "of growth, and of the gradual progress of life as it mounted within my breast"; the great trauma was leaving his underground childhood home and staggering into the light of day, which "laid hold on me with violence, making me drunk as some malignant liquor might have done, suddenly poured through my veins; and I felt that my being, till then so compact and simple, underwent shaking and loss, as though it were bound to disperse upon the winds" (de Guérin 1899, 6–8).

In one remarkable passage, de Guérin exploits his choice to use the centaur as narrator so as to make his reader think about the strangeness of the human form: when he encountered his first man, the centaur

[...] despired him. 'There at most' said I, 'is but the half of me! How short his steps are, and how uneasy his gait! His eyes seem to measure space with sadness. Doubtless it is some centaur, degraded by the gods, one whom they have reduced to dragging himself along like that.' (9)

Macareus describes in sensual detail what it felt like to relax by standing in rivers and allowing the waves to sweep him in any direction. He recalls galloping violently and stopping suddenly short of an abyss to savour the thrilling "rapture of vigour" he had reached. He would run holding leafy branches above his head to feel the rustling of the leaves, drink in the cool breezes, gaze on the mountain summits, and above all become "intoxicated" by the sheer experience of speed and the stirrings in his young flanks (9–11).

The monologue describes epiphanies of mountain gods, and the wisdom which Cheiron (now long dead) had once imparted to Macareus, and which he now hands on to Melampus. It is exquisitely, lyrically written and shows a powerful attempt to imagine the experience of embodiment as a centaur, as well as interchanges between two centaurs and between a centaur and a human. Underlying the text is the sense of a powerful but frustrated physicality, and it is probably relevant that after his mother's death de Guérin became attached to his much older sister Eugénie to a degree that seems almost too intense, and later sexually infatuated with at least one of her friends (Smith 1949, 31–34). The sternness of his religious father meant that his relationships with her and with another woman for whom he developed agonisingly intense feelings, Marie de Maistre, were conducted secretly (36–41).

A Centaur for the Future

The reason for dwelling at such length on de Guérin's extraordinary work is that it shows what can be achieved, by an expert writer, by putting the mythical beast's private experience at the heart of the tale. In contemporary writing, the only two centaurs I have encountered who come close to using identification with a centaur in such a powerful way are the central characters in two books of wholly disparate genre. The first is the 1997 science fiction novel *The Andalite Chronicles* by K. A. Applegate. The narrator is a centaur-like creature, an Andalite (a member of an advanced race of aliens), called Elfangor. The book consists entirely of a flashback containing of his autobiographical memoir, uploaded before he faced certain death in combat with a cosmic enemy and also gave some young humans the superpowers which will one day in the future guarantee their victory over the same enemy. Applegate has used the Cheironic motifs of voluntary death, and helping the human race, but she has also taken the opportunity to think hard about the physical experience of her physically hybrid hero.

The other interesting example is *A Centaur's Life*, or *Sentōru no Nayami*, a manga written by Kei Murayama, beginning in 2011 and now running to nineteen volumes. In 2017 it was also made into an anime television series. Here the centaur is female, a pubertal girl called Himeno Kimihara, and the hybridity trope is used effectively to explore her sense of discomfort with her changing body and sexuality.²⁰ It is interesting that the concept of the centaur in manga literature, "as an important symbol of self-transformation", has been used by art therapists working with the young in Hong Kong to help adolescents with their personal body images, stereotypes of ideal beauty, dysmorphism, and the challenges that their perceptions of their physical selves present in the real world (Lau 2013, 49). The manga use of the girl-centaur's subjectivity reminded me of Marie Darrieussecq's dazzling novella (for adults) *Pig Tales* (1996), sub-titled in English *A Novel of Lust and Transformation*. The female first-person narrator is a sex-industry worker who turns into a sow. The novel examines closely the objectification of working-class women's bodies and the difficulty of avoiding participation in the sex industry for women with little education and few alternative means of acquiring a livelihood. Indeed, the novel emphasizes the difficulty finding a voice in society faced by anyone whose social value is assessed solely on their physical assets – in sexual or any other kind of bodily labour: it is difficult to write one's story when one lives in a pigsty, we are told repeatedly. Yet such is the narrator's extraordinary adventure in this terribly sensual fable.

The pig-lady has a generalized historical relationship, as the subject of metamorphosis, with Ovid's sexploited heroines and an inverted one with Homer's

²⁰ I am very grateful to my teenaged daughter Georgia Poynder for discussing this manga with me.

Circe in the *Odyssey*, a sexually exciting figure who turns men into swine. But by far her most specific relationship is with the Lucius of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses, or Golden Ass*. Darrieussecq's pig-heroine has prompted less critical attention than her more oblique references to individuals in Franz Kafka and George Orwell, but her classical heritage is revealed in several features. These include the application of potions, the treatment of Christianity as a bizarre mystery cult, the vision of political dystopia, the physical sufferings undergone by the narrator, her experience of bestial sex from the animal's perspective, and even the Latin yelled at her by the religious fanatic in the lunatic asylum, "vade retro, vade retro" (Darrieussecq 1996, 85; see further Hall 2007, 135). The female middle-class writer (an avowed feminist) here makes her point about the male treatment of working-class women's bodies by inscribing her own subjectivity on one of the paramount classical foundation texts of subjectivity in fiction. The possibilities for she-centaurs for young female readers could be just as rich.

Conclusion

This essay has reviewed the exceptional status of Cheiron as narrator and hero of archaic poems, and some of the ways in which authors other than those for children and young adults have exploited his peculiar ontology in adventurous literary experiments. This classical reception narrative is interesting in itself, but it has been written in the hopes that it may one day stimulate expert authors for younger readers to make fuller use of the centaurs in English-language literature, especially Cheiron, than has so far been done in the celebrated fantasy fiction tradition stretching from Lewis to Rowling, Riordan, Wynne Jones and Colfer.

Thinking about the use of a centaur as an authorial voice, beyond the suggestion that all little children listening to someone reading them a story are somehow replaying the roles of Achilles or Perseus to Cheiron, could help young people think about disability, or their own dysmorphic perceptions of their own bodies, or the changes entailed by puberty, or pain, longevity, old age, mortality, being sexually objectified, or racially denigrated, or alienated from the natural environment. It could help them recall their earliest childhood sensations, their physical discovery of the material world, their attitudes to animals, and the sensations of growth and increasing power. It could help them prepare for school, for carers other than their parents, for learning to understand fostering and adoption. It could help them think about different ways of approaching friends or romantic partners and even dealing with the death of their parents. Cheiron was the first Youth Author. We still have much to learn from him.

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ELENA ERMOLAEVA

Centaurs in Russian Fairy Tales: From the Half-Dog Pulicane to the Centaur Polkan

For my father Leonid (1937–2016)

This paper discusses the reception of Ancient Greek centaurs in Russian tales and apocrypha, which appear in Old Russian translations and adaptations of medieval stories (Likhachev 1989). My focus is on the tales of King Solomon and the beast Kitovras, and the story of Prince Bova and centaur Polkan that involve centaurs and indirectly inherit the paradoxical characteristics of the Ancient Greek mythical figure of half man, half horse. The tale about Prince Bova was quite popular in Russia in sixteenth–nineteenth centuries, but in the Soviet time it was almost forgotten¹ and was known rather to specialists in literature and folklore than to a wider audience. Now, the story about Prince Bova and Polkan came back to Russian children in verse and prose adaptations (Yakhnin 2001; Usachev 2013).

“King Solomon and Kitovras”

I begin with the tales of King Solomon and the beast Kitovras (probably the Russian transliteration of the Greek word for centaur, κένταυρος, or the Sanskrit *gandharva*²) and folkloric *apocrypha* based on biblical stories (Anonymous 1863; Lurie 1964, 1989; Anonymous 1969b, 2002; Anonymous 1997).³ These tales describe how King Solomon decided to construct the Temple in Jerusalem with the help of a “fleet-footed beast” Kitovras, a half man, half animal that possessed enormous physical strength. He had, however, a crippling passion for wine and women. Solomon’s counsellors captured Kitovras with cunning and

¹ Russian storyteller Anna Korol’kova (1892–1984) edited a short paraphrase of “The Story of Prince Bova” under her name (Korol’kova 1976).

² On Gandharva as a probable prototype of the Russian Kitovras see Kuhn (1852).

³ I have encountered transliterations of Professor Yakov Lurie’s (1912–1996) name spelled in Cyrillic Лурье as follows: Lurie, Lur’e, and Luria (cf. Ermolaeva 2016).

craft, luring him to wells filled with wine and honey. Kitovras drank from these and fell into a drunken slumber, during which time he was fettered in chains.

Kitovras is portrayed as a wizard and a prophet, wiser even than Solomon himself. On the way to King Solomon's court, the captured Kitovras enigmatically ridicules both a man at the market deliberating over a pair of boots to last him seven years and a fortune-teller seated on the ground, and Kitovras weeps at the sight of a wedding. Later, Kitovras explains that the buyer of the boots had only seven days to live, that, unbeknownst to the fortune-teller, treasure lay buried under the spot upon which he was seated, and that the bridegroom was to die shortly.

Kitovras helps Solomon to construct the Temple, but the King doubts Kitovras' wisdom, for it did not save him from being captured by men. Kitovras asks the King to remove his chains, after which he immediately throws Solomon to the ends of the Earth, where Solomon is forced to wander as a beggar for some years. Following this encounter, the King is so fearful of Kitovras that he stations sixty brave warriors by his own bedside every night.⁴

The tales of King Solomon and the beast Kitovras were known in Russia probably since the fourteenth century or even earlier. The most convincing argument for this date is the image of Kitovras on the Vasilii Gates of the Cathedral of St. Sophia in Novgorod, donated by Archbishop Vasilii Kalika in 1335. The gates combine religious and fantastical motifs with a winged Kitovras casting Solomon away. An inscription reads: "Китоврас мече(т) братом своим Соломоном на Обетованную землю за слово" [Kitovras meche(t) bratom svoim Solomonom na Obetovannuiu zemliu za slovo] / "Kitovras throws his brother Solomon to the Promised Land for <his> word".⁵

⁴ Lurie (1989) writes: "Apart from this tale about Kitovras, several more have survived. The miscellany of the White Lake Monastery of St. Cyril scribe Euphrosyne contains a short but very interesting tale in which the capture of Kitovras is due to the cunning [his – E. E.] wife, whom the 'fleet-footed beast' conceals in his [Kitovras' – E. E.] ear. But his wife manages to tell 'her young lover' about the wells from which Kitovras usually drinks; and after this they put wine in them. The meeting of Kitovras and Solomon is described differently here: 'What is the finest thing in the world?' asks the king. 'Freedom', replies Kitovras, breaking everything and leaping free. A third tale about Kitovras, which has survived only in manuscripts of the seventeenth century and later, also includes the theme of female cunning. Here the victim is not Kitovras but Solomon. With the help of a magician Kitovras steals Solomon's wife. Solomon sets off to get her back, but due to his wife's treachery falls into Kitovras' hands. The king is sent to the gallows, but asks permission to play on his horn. In reply to a triple call from Solomon's horn his army appears; the king is freed and executes Kitovras, his wife, and the magician" (trans. Kathleen Cook-Horujy, in Likhachev 1989, [n.p.]).

⁵ On the date, cf. Lurie (1863, 254–258). Tsar Ivan the Terrible brought the gates to his residence in Alexandrov near Moscow in 1570, where they remain today, installed at the southern entrance of the Cathedral of the Assumption.

From the end of the fifteenth century, the Kitovras tales were included in the Old Russian *Paleia*, a collection of interpretations of biblical stories. A stamp of the scribe, a monk by the name of Euphrosyn, who lived in the fifteenth century, was preserved on the page under the image of the Kitovras (Lurie 1964, 7–11; cf. also Kagan and Lurie 1988, s.v. “Efrosin, monakh Kirillo-Belozerskogo monastyria” [Euphrosyn, Monk of the Kirillo-Belozersky Monastery], Bobrov 2017, 423–449, cf. Fig. 1).



Fig. 1: The Kitovras and a stamp of the scribe Euphrosyn, Monk of the Kirillo-Belozersky Monastery (fifteenth century). MS. The National Library of Russia, a collection of the Kirillo-Belozersky Monastery, 11 / 1088, 127.

The stories about King Solomon and Kitovras are similar to the Talmudic legends about King Solomon and Asmodeus, a king of demons (Veselovsky 1872, 105–127). Asmodeus is a creature with a human body and face but the feet of a cock. He is a rival of Solomon in wisdom and possesses tremendous physical strength and a weakness for wine and women. He also helps Solomon construct the Temple in Jerusalem, after which he hurls the King over 400 leagues away from Jerusalem and takes his place for some years. When Solomon finally returns, Asmodeus flees from his wrath.

There are two versions of the Asmodeus stories in the European medieval literature. These two versions are known as the Western and Eastern, respectively. The Western version titles the narrative “Solomon and Marcolf”, or “Solomon and Marolf”, where Marcolf is styled as a sort of “wise fool”. It was first printed under the title *Dis buch seit von kunig Salomon vnd siner huß frouwen Salome wie sy der künig fore nam vnd wie sy Morolff künig Salomon brüder wider brocht* in Strasbourg by the printer Matthias Hupfuff in 1499, including

woodcut illustrations (cf. Herzog 1922).⁶ Alexander Veselovsky (1838–1906), one of the first researchers in the field of comparative literary studies in Russia, assumed that the prototype for the Eastern Slavonic version could be Byzantine texts. According to Veselovsky (1872, 137), Byzantine Jews may have translated the Talmudic stories about Solomon and Asmodeus into Greek, translations which are presumably now lost. If Veselovsky’s theory is accepted, the Russian tales could shed some light on the Byzantine *Vorlage* of the extant Old Russian paraphrases.

Perhaps the paradoxical and ambivalent Talmudic demon Asmodeus was transformed into the Greek centaur and preserved as Kitovras in the Russian tales because its nature is also paradoxical. The Greek centaur Cheiron, for example, is a wise prophet, a tutor and friend of the main Ancient Greek heroes (e.g., Hercules, Achilles), Actaeon, and the god Asclepius (Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 2.5.4, 3.4.4, 3.10.3, 3.13.6). At that time, other centaurs have mostly a different nature, they are “depicted in Greek myths and art mostly as lustful, uncontrolled, uncivilized creatures of great strength” (Maurice 2015, 142), as if their wild beast nature prevails over a human one.

“The Story of Prince Bova”

Another tale which I would like to discuss is that of the “Povest’ o Bove-Koroleviche” [The Story of Prince Bova], a Russian version of the Franco-Italian novel “Buovo d’Antona” (ed. Panchenko, see under Anonymous 1969a, 516–541). The story was popular in the Slavonic world and circulated in prose translations (Børtnes 1992, 29). In Russia, the romance appeared in the mid-sixteenth century, translated from a Polish or Old Belarusian version, which was, in turn, translated from a Serbo-Croatian rendition of the Italian romance composed in Ragusa, modern Dubrovnik (Salmina 1988). The result was the Russian “Story of Prince Bova”, where the principal character has the features of a knight of medieval courtly tales mixed with those of a Russian folk hero (*bogatyř*). The Russian names are amusingly transmitted from their Italian source: Bova from Buovo, Gvidon – Guidone, Dadon – Dadone, Simbalda – Sinibaldo, Lukaper – Lucca Ferri, Druzhnevna – Drusiana, and finally the name of Bova’s mother, who is called Militrisa, seems to derive from the epithet “meltris” to Blondoia (Blandoria) of the “Buovo d’Antona”, which in its turn derived from Latin *meretrix* that literally means ‘a woman of easy virtue’ (Nyrop 1883, 215 and 284; Veselovsky 1885). Militrisa is the wife of King Dadon, the

⁶ My thanks go to Zuzanna Wiśnicka-Tomalak who pointed me to the Polish version that was made after the German one and entitled *Rozmowy, które miał król Salomon mądry z Marchołtem grubym a sprośnym, a wszakoż, jako o niem powiedają, barzo z wymownym*.

murderer of her former husband, Bova's father. Thus, Bova is, as it were, the vengeful Hamlet of Russian folklore.

One of the characters in the Italian original was Pulicane, a half-human half-dog hybrid, son of a noblewoman and a dog. In the Russian tale, this character is called Polkan. That is, the Italian name *Puli-cane* ("a half dog") was transliterated to Russian as *Polkan*, a name that in Russian sounds like *Pol-kon'*, which would mean 'half horse' (*pol* – 'half', *kon'* – 'horse'). Thus, Polkan could become a centaur as a result of folk-etymology "rethinking".

It is worth observing however that, in some Russian versions of the legend, Polkan is actually half man, half dog ("Skazka ob Ilye Muromtse i chudishche Polkanishche" [The Tale of Ilya of Murom and the Monster Polkan]; Rovinsky 1881, 82–115, where Polkan is a dog-*bogatyr*). This may perhaps be one of the reasons why one of the most popular names for big dogs in Russia remains Polkan.⁷ According to the fable "The Renowned Hero, Bova Korolevich, and the Princess Druzhnevna", Polkan, an enemy of the protagonist, Prince Bova, possesses enormous strength and remarkable speed ("Polkan took Bova's battle sword and slew ten thousand men", "Polkan clears seven versts⁸ with a single leap", Carrick et al. 2015, [n.p.]). The following description of the battle between Bova and Polkan is worth considering, for which I quote the passage of the tale:

Bova took his battle sword, mounted his steed and rode forth. Polkan met him and cried out with a terrible voice: "Ha, rascal! You shall not escape my hands!" Saying this, he uprooted an oak-tree of a hundred years, striking Bova with it on the head. Bova fell from his saddle. [...] Polkan caught his horse, but the horse began fighting with its hooves and biting with its teeth until Polkan fled. The horse pursued him, until Polkan's strength failed him, and he dropped half-dead near the tent of Bova Korolevich. Bova went up to Polkan and asked whether he would rather live or die, to which Polkan replied: "Brother Bova, let us make peace with one another and be brothers, for there no one in the whole world could match us". (Carrick et al. 2015, [n.p.])

It is interesting that when Polkan fights with Prince Bova, Bova's horse seems to take him for a horse, fighting with him and eventually defeating him. The double nature of the centaur Polkan apparently is paralleled with the double battle described in the tale – both with Bova and his horse. After this battle, the centaur Polkan becomes the best friend, advisor, and protector of Bova, like Cheiron for Achilles. He is dedicated to Bova as well as to Bova's wife and to their children.

⁷ *Polkan i Shavka* [Polkan and Shavka] is a Soviet cartoon (1949) based on the fable (1945) with the same name about two dogs (Mikhalkov 1981). Polkan is big and brave, while Shavka is small and cowardly.

⁸ A verst (Russian *versta*) is an obsolete Russian unit of length; the verst of the seventeenth century was 1.49 km.

Finally, Polkan is a prophet, having predicted his own death by a lion's teeth, to which he indeed succumbs while defending Bova's wife and two children.

In Russia, this tale was extremely popular and became a part of Russian folklore. It was depicted in numerous cheap *lubok* prints alongside woodcut illustrations.⁹ Polkan was shown in “The Fight of Bova with the Hero [*bogatyr*] Polkan”, “Bova Speaks with Polkan”, “Polkan Battles Lions”, and “Bova Mourns the Lost Polkan” (Rovinsky 1881, 84). Who could ever have expected to find a picture of a centaur in remote Russian villages? Polkan has also become a character of Kargopol toys, painted clay figurines of people and animals made in Northern Russia, in the eponymous town in the Arkhangelsk region (cf. Fig. 2).



Fig. 2: The Polkan, a Kargopol toy, phot. Elena Ermolaeva.

From the time of Peter the Great on, “The Story of Prince Bova” was popular mainly among the lower classes¹⁰ but was also enjoyed by such eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century poets as Gavriil Derzhavin (1743–1816)¹¹ and

⁹ Russian *lubok* prints were described by Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Rovinsky (1824–1895), who collected them in *Russkie narodnye kartinki* [Russian Folk Images] (1881). This book was republished in two volumes (Rovinsky and Sobko 1900; reprinted as Rovinsky and Sobko 2002).

¹⁰ In 1695 Prince Alexei Petrovich, a son of Peter the Great, possessed a manuscript book on Bova in images, cf. Rovinsky and Sobko 2002, vol. 1, 109, No. 14. Rovinsky wrote that in his time Bova was among the usual reading of the bourgeoisie and soldiers (*ibid.*).

¹¹ In his poem “Felitsa” (1782) dedicated to Catherine the Great, Derzhavin wrote humorously about his *ego*-character: “Moi um i serdtse prosveshchali, Polkana i

Alexander Radishchev (1749–1802).¹² Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837) also enjoyed his nurse's accounts of Prince Bova and Polkan and, as a result, he used some elements and names from the story in his own fairy tales: a persecuted wanderer Gvidon and his father Saltan ("Skazka o tsare Saltane, o syne ego slavnom i moguchem kniaze Gvidone Saltanoviche i o prekrasnoi tsarevne Lebedi" ["The Tale of Tsar Saltan of His Son the Renowned and Mighty *bogatyr* Prince Gvidon Saltanovich, and of the Beautiful Princess-Swan"], 1831, Pushkin 1957a), Dadon ("Skazka o Zolotom petushke" ["The Tale of the Golden Cockerel"], 1834, Pushkin 1957b). In 1814, Pushkin began to write "his" story of Bova but, unfortunately, he left it unfinished.

"The Story of Prince Bova" in the Modern Russian Children's Literature

Prince Bova and the Half-Dog Polkan came back to Russian children in a verse adaptation by Andrei Usachev (b. 1958), one of the best modern Russian authors, who writes for children in prose and verses. He proposed a short light version of the almost forgotten old Russian tale about *bogatyr* Bova and Polkan, which, as mentioned above, was admired by Alexander Pushkin. In Usachev's tale, Polkan comes back to his Italian prototype Pulicane, who is the Half-Dog.

Usachev told his story in modern language, from time to time deliberately allowing charming anachronisms and paronomasia: his "kid Bova glowed like the light bulb to the delight of his daddy" (Usachev 2013, 126, trans. E. E.). His style is characterized by the use of soft humour and irony, hyperboles, and exaggerations, play on words, even children's slang.

Usachev softened the most violent moments of the tale, thus, his Bova, this modern Orestes and Hamlet at the same time, who exacted revenge for his father's death, did not bury his mother Militrisa alive, like in the original tale, but locked her away in a monastery. His Polkan was not ravaged by lions but he accompanied and protected Bova's family till the very end of the tale.

In Usachev's tale there are some famous motifs present, known, for example, from the *Odyssey*: a husband at the wedding party of his wife (Bova, Druzhneva, and Markobrun), recognition and "proof of identity" motif (Druzhneva recognized Bova from his old head wound of the depth of her three fingers), "one against many" motif (Bova against forty thousand warriors), etc. The illustrations in the book are in the style of old Russian *lubok*.

In 2001, the interpretation of the Prince Bova in prose on the base of the "folk story" was edited by Leonid Yakhnin (1937–2018), a poet, playwright, and translator (Yakhnin 2001). He proposed to children the softest version of the end

Bovu chitai" ["I am enlightening my mind and heart reading Polkan and Bova"] (2015, 85).

¹² Radishchev wrote his political satire poem "Bova" (ca. 1798–1799), which followed the popular narrative of "The Story of Prince Bova" (Radishchev 1907, 383–405).

of the tale, so that Bova forgives his mother Milisa (*sic*), and lives with her, Druzhnevna, and his sons Licharda and Simbalda in peace. Yakhnin's Polkan was depicted as a mighty centaur with features of Russian *bogatyr*.

The Russian tales and *apocrypha* about King Solomon and the beast Kitovras and of Prince Bova and Polkan seem indirectly to incorporate the ancient tradition of depicting a centaur as a paradoxical creature: on one hand, savage, violent, and destructive, but on the other, wise, prophetic, and protective.

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KAROLINE THAIDIGSMANN

(Non-)Flying Horses in the Polish People's Republic: The Crisis of the Mythical Beast in Ambivalent Polish Children's Literature

When censorship in communist Poland¹ prohibited open discussion of political issues, Polish authors used various forms of “Aesopian language” to communicate with their readership in an indirect manner (Głowiński 2004, 69–70). Especially after Stalin's death the veiling of political criticism in an allegorical garb became a common device in Polish literature (Smulski 1998, 146). For some authors, children's literature came to serve as a convenient genre for this kind of indirect communication. The result was a number of so-called ambivalent children's books² that are astonishing due to their original way of communicating with a dual readership of children and adult readers alike. In addition to the camouflage provided by the genre of children's literature, some authors implemented a second layer of camouflage in their texts in order to conceal their criticism: motifs and figures from mythology – mythical beasts amongst them.³

In the following, I will analyze three ambivalent Polish children's books from the 1960s and the 1980s in order to enquire as to the function of mythical beasts in communicating with a dual readership in times of governmental censorship. In my work as a “mythozoologist”, my research, which is rather more exemplary than exhaustive, focuses on children's texts in which mythical beasts (at least

¹ The use of the terms “communist” or “socialist” is controversial in regard to the Polish People's Republic. While the social and economic realities of Poland became increasingly socialist from the mid-1950s onwards, the communist doctrine officially had not been given up before 1989. The usage of the two terms in my paper tries to comply with this.

² In children's literature studies, the term “ambivalent children's literature” is used for works that address two different audiences – that of adult and that of child readers – and can therefore be read on differing levels. Cf., e.g., Shavit (1986, 66).

³ The general prominence of motifs from Antiquity in the Polish People's Republic has been pointed out by the Polish classicist Stanisław Stabryła. Stabryła argues that in Polish literature after the Renaissance, no other period showed such a strong return to Antiquity than the thirty years between 1945–1975 (Stabryła 1983, 580).

seemingly) enter the contemporary world of Polish everyday life and thereby cause a confrontation between the sphere of mythology and that of the present age.

The mythical beasts I came across during my research on covertly politicized Polish children's literature appeared to be experiencing a deep crisis, ranging from a questioning of their identity to a denial of their own existence. My paper postulates that authors use the crisis of the mythical beast in their texts as a symptom of the particular socio-political situation in Poland at the time. Starting with Joanna Kulmowa's Pegasus in her now classic children's book *Wio, Leokadio!* [Giddyap, Leokadia!] and moving on to more monstrous mythical species in Wiktor Woroszyński's cult book *Cyryl, gdzie jesteś?* [Cyril, Where Are You?], and Dorota Terakowska's popular novel for young readers *Władca Lewawu* [The Lord of Lewaw], I will pursue the crisis of the mythical beast and examine its historical context and political meaning.⁴

The Crisis of a (Non-)Flying Horse: Joanna Kulmowa's *Giddyap, Leokadia!*

In his essay "Pegaz" [Pegasus], published posthumously in the collection *Król mrówek. Prywatna mitologia* [The King of Ants. Private Mythology],⁵ Joanna Kulmowa's contemporary, the Polish poet and mythophile Zbigniew Herbert (1924–1998) reflects on the existence of mythical beasts in the Greek imagination. Scholars, Herbert writes (2008, 108–111), explained the multitude of disharmoniously composed, revolting monsters in Greek mythology as an attempt by the Greeks to visualize discrepancies within their own culture and in relation to the world around them. Herbert adds that this cultural and historical background, particularly the Greeks' situation as a people repeatedly threatened with invasion by foreign enemies, offers a psychological explanation not only for the origin of monsters in the ancient imagination. It also explains the existence of a beast that is of completely contrary conception: the Pegasus. In Herbert's opinion

⁴ Even though *Giddyap, Leokadia!*; *Cyryl, Where Are You?*; and *The Lord of Lewaw* are ranked as classic Polish children's literature, there have hardly been any studies on these texts. Especially Kulmowa's and Woroszyński's texts are more nostalgically remembered by adults today than actually read by children. Particularly rare are studies that in their intent go beyond an educational purpose. In 1998 a volume on Kulmowa's writing, including her works for children, was published following a conference on the author at the University of Szczecin (ed. Chęcińska 1998). On *Cyryl, Where Are You?* we have mainly reviews. On Terakowska's work in general there are plenty of articles and reviews in Polish. Some of them are available via Terakowska's homepage at <<http://terakowska.art.pl/wellbad.htm>> (accessed January 9, 2018). Due to Terakowska's novel being recommended reading in schools there also is an analysis for students (Mafutala-Makuch 2013).

⁵ Herbert wrote his "private mythology" over many years starting probably at the beginning of the 1980s. The Polish poet and editor Ryszard Krynicki composed and published the collection of essays only after Herbert's death.

the Pegasus is a perfectly harmonious incorporation of “freedom and integrity” (109) and thus the symbol of victimization as well as that of hope of a repressed people. By linking the Pegasus with the situation of an oppressed people, the Polish poet connects the winged horse with the situation of his own nation.⁶ This idea of the Pegasus as a symbol of the oppressed Polish people finds an original equivalent in Joanna Kulmowa's 1964 children's book *Giddyap, Leokadia!*⁷

Giddyap, Leokadia! is the story of the talking horse Leokadia – the last carriage horse in the Polish capital – and of her beloved carriage driver Aloizy. Due to modernization they are both dismissed from work. Leokadia is much too vain about her age to join Aloizy in his retirement and she decides to look for further employment elsewhere. The reader accompanies Leokadia as she passes through various social milieus in order to find herself a new job – faithful Aloizy always in tow. The enterprise of finding a new job and the crisis of identity connected to this process become even more complicated as the horse, fed by a miraculous woman who is selling flowers, develops wings, which gradually break through her back.⁸ The street names in the novel guide the reader rather bluntly to the figurative meaning of Leokadia's transformation into a winged horse: Leokadia's path to the flower seller's market stall leads her via “Allegorical Street” to “Pegasus Street”.⁹

⁶ Poland had been repressed for centuries by foreign regimes. At the end of the eighteenth century Poland was partitioned and lost its sovereignty for 123 years. During WW2 the country was occupied by the Germans, and after WW2 communism was introduced under the pressure of the Soviet Union.

⁷ Joanna Kulmowa (1928–2018) published many volumes of poetry for adults as well as for children. Additionally she wrote prose, pieces for the theatre, radio, and television. In the 1970s she was connected with the political opposition and published underground writings. Many of her texts express a religious curiosity and conviction. In 1971 a chapter of *Giddyap, Leokadia!* was included in the volume *Ein Kinderbuch quer durch die Welt* (Hladej 1971), a collection of the world's best children's books published on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of UNICEF (Chęcińska 1998a and 1998b, 113).

⁸ Leokadia is fed with willow catkins. In Polish folklore willows and willow catkins are connected with various magic powers, ranging from health enhancement and renewal to alliances with the devil. Swallowing willow catkins was even considered to be a precondition for salvation, as the Polish poet Mikołaj Rej stated in the sixteenth century. I thank Zuzanna Wiśnicka-Tomalak for pointing this tradition out to me.

⁹ Some motifs of *Giddyap, Leokadia!* can be traced back to various precursors. The wish to become a speaking horse that might finally get wings is also a topic in Sławomir Mrożek's “Chcę być koniem” [“I Want to Be a Horse”, 1957], a short satire on socialist everyday life and bureaucracy. Chęcińska names Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński's poem “Zaczarowana dorożka” [“The Enchanted Carriage”, 1948] and Erich Kästner's *Der 35. Mai oder Konrad reitet in die Südsee* (1931) as an inspiration for the creation of Leokadia (Chęcińska 1998b, 113).

With the political and social situation in communist Poland at the time in mind, there are at least three interrelated themes attached to the allegorical meaning of the Pegasus Leokadia. These are:

1. the topic of individual versus prescribed imagination;
2. the more general topic of conformity and otherness;
3. the broad theme of modernization and progress.

All three topics are self-referential insofar as they reflect in particular on the relationship between the artist – primarily the writer – and society. In order to discuss the afore-mentioned themes, Kulmowa uses a specific strategy, which may be understood as a subversive incantation of socialist ideals: the author refers to these ideals but at the same time evades them by confronting the reality of socialism with her own vision of a utopian society. This strategy can best be seen in Kulmowa's placing of her Pegasus in the working class milieu.¹⁰

A Pegasus with a Worker's Background: Prescribed versus Individual Imagination

According to Leokadia herself, her wings are the result of too much dreaming (Kulmowa 1964, 45 and 164).¹¹ Thus the Pegasus in Kulmowa's book seems to be a classic allegory of the divine inspiration of the poet and artist. However, Leokadia is far from being sublime. Not only does she have considerable difficulty in actually using her wings to fly, but being a "Carriage-Pegasus" ("Pegaz Dorożkarski", 131) she also has a working-class background.¹² As an orphan, Leokadia's origins are traced more to under the wing of the hen who raised her (41) than to Medusa's neck and Poseidon's loins, and she does not consider the wide sky to be her true home, but rather the familiar Square of the Six Horses in the middle of town (131). Leokadia's working-class roots are emphasized throughout the book. By linking the milieu of the working class to that of the artist and intellectual, Kulmowa only superficially puts into practice the socialist ideal of the worker-writer – the writer from and for the people. Leokadia's performance as a singer of revolutionary workers' anthems ends after just one song and instead

¹⁰ Another narrative strategy in the book is Leokadia's disarming naivety. By taking everything literally, Leokadia challenges the world around her and unravels the repressive character of her surroundings. The novel is a dazzling array of linguistic games, particularly phraseological ones and their (intentional) misunderstandings.

¹¹ The translations into English are mine through the whole chapter, unless stated otherwise.

¹² Interestingly, Herbert, too, depicts the winged horse in his essay "Pegasus" as a "working class" Pegasus (2008, 108–111).

of being exploited as the bard of a collective utopia, Leokadia persists with her independent way of being, stating that she was “[her] own Pegasus” (143).

In contrast to the collective utopia of socialist/communist society – this once winged idea that, however, proved itself to be clipping wings in reality – Kulmowa develops in her narrative an egalitarian utopia that does not consist of one collectively prescribed dream shared by all people, but in the activity of individual dreaming shared by all people. It is the utopia of a community that does not extinguish the individual, but takes the individual as its foundation.¹³ The Carriage-Pegasus is an image representing the potential in everybody to grow their own wings.

At the same time Leokadia stands for the specific situation of the artist, particularly the writer in society. In an interview, Kulmowa states that Leokadia is a self-portrait (Mikołajewski 2005). This portrait presents itself in a not entirely flattering manner as a mixture of self-doubt and boasting. In an amusing but at the same time merciless way, Kulmowa exposes the writer's ambivalent nature. While their highly individual way of perceiving the world can allow writers to fend off the restrictions of a conformist society and a suppressive reality, their narcissistic nature will still make them particularly prone to misusing their wings or even bargaining with them. Seduced by flattery, recognition, and the mere need for money, Leokadia temporarily gives in to various forms of instrumentalization and seduction.¹⁴ But every time, her seemingly opportunistic attitude – “one flies wherever one gets the opportunity to do so” (95) – is finally given up. Her persistence in her independent nature retains the upper hand and helps her to regain her integrity.

Being a (Non-)flying (Non-)horse: Conformity and Otherness

Individuality demands space to develop; conformist society does not offer this space. In Kulmowa's book the Pegasus' space-filling wings become the visible sign of the social misfit.¹⁵ Leokadia's experiences are a constant confrontation

¹³ On Kulmowa as a defender of individualism see also Chęcińska (1998b, 116). In Kulmowa the idea of a community of individuals is at the same time to be understood as a community of solidarity. This is demonstrated when Leokadia learns to fly. Leokadia develops the skill to actually fly only when she needs it to save her friend Aloizy from danger (Kulmowa 1964, 82–83).

¹⁴ Leokadia temporarily becomes the muse of an opportunistic poet looking for cheap fame and forbidding Leokadia from contacting her friend Aloizy. She writes poems for a newspaper that conforms to the regulations of censorship. On a trip to France she becomes a film star and therefore gives up all rights to make her own decisions. Eventually she even takes a fling at political and military leadership in her home town.

¹⁵ “I need more and more space, Aloizy,” Leokadia anxiously comments on the growing of her wings. “Where will we put this excess?” (Kulmowa 1964, 55). On Leokadia's wings as a visible sign of otherness see also Chęcińska (1998b, 115). Chęcińska

with exclusion and lead her towards a major crisis of identity. The consequences of her being different are felt everywhere: she does not fit into bureaucratic categories at the office; she either does not get a job or she loses it quickly; she is put into confined spaces, such as the museum and the zoo; she is – for some time – expelled from the country; and at the end of the book the residents of her home town demand that Leokadia be relocated to the outskirts of town.

On the one hand, Leokadia is denied the right of existence by others – “Pegasi do not exist” (48), she is told at the office. On the other hand, she herself denies her own identity in order to fit in. She dyes her wings and hides them under a cape that carries the inscription “Leokadia non-horse” (87). Her explicit declaration that she is a non-flying non-horse echoes the self-censorship and self-denial demanded of dissenters by totalitarian regimes. The severity of the identity crisis forced onto Leokadia is depicted in her anxiety at taking off the concealing cape: “‘I’m a bit afraid,’ Leokadia whispered. ‘Maybe even under the cape I’ve already become a non-horse, too’” (125).

The question of conformity and otherness in Kulmowa’s novel is also treated explicitly in terms of class and in terms of race. Two chapter headings highlight this aspect: “Leokadia and the Family Tree” and “Leokadia and Race”. While the first heading also alludes to class as a selective factor, the second clearly names race as a reason for Leokadia’s exclusion. The Pegasus – half horse, half bird – becomes an image for the “half breed”.¹⁶ Leokadia is confronted with racial biases at home as well as during her exile in France. The ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity, the author seems to tell us, have even been betrayed in their country of origin, and they have not found a new home in Poland either.¹⁷

discusses the conflict between conformity and otherness in terms of mass and individuality.

¹⁶ “‘Race,’ Leokadia wonders. ‘Yet another characteristic I am lacking’” (Kulmowa 1964, 169). Without a pedigree Leokadia has no chance to find a job at the racetrack and a sign at the café informs her that “[n]o feathers of any kind are allowed inside” (205). Twenty years after WW2 and the German occupation of Poland, adult readers might have been reminded of the racial policies of the Third Reich.

¹⁷ In ambivalent Polish children’s literature France, in particular Paris, is frequently used as a place of reference. See, e.g., the novels by Woroszyński, *Cyril, gdzie jesteś?* [Cyril, Where Are You?, 1962] and *Podmuch malowanego wiatru* [The Gust of Painted Wind, 1965], and by Anna Kamińska, *W nieparyżu i gdzie indziej* [In Non-Paris and Elsewhere, 1967]. In contrast to other Western countries which were unequivocally regarded as enemies by the Polish communist regime, France held an ambivalent position in the country’s official diplomacy. Therefore, it allowed multi-layered references. On the one hand, it was a part of the capitalist “hostile camp” (which, for opponents of communism, was a symbol of freedom and democracy). On the other hand, it was regarded as a friend of Poland due to its leftist and revolutionary tradition (Brodala 2001, 150).

Like in other ambivalent Polish children's books,¹⁸ in *Giddyap Leokadia!* we are confronted with the juxtaposition of different models of society and rule. In the course of Kulmowa's novel, the ruling dictator, who sends critical poets to prison and expels Leokadia from the country, is substituted by a "government of the people". However, in the dictator's rule the adult reader easily recognizes the mechanisms inherent in the then-existing Eastern European communist regimes. Thus, the depiction of the former – autocratic – regime already reflects the new one. This is underpinned by the fact that after the change of power the situation does not actually improve, the only difference being that Leokadia now is not to be expelled from the city by one autocratic ruler, but by the "will of the people". And there is an even more pessimistic twist after the change of power from autocracy to communism in Kulmowa's book: while the people under the former autocratic rule acted in solidarity, this solidarity is lost under the new "rule of the people".

Stagnating Motion: Progress and Mothballs

Instead of reading Kulmowa's book as a tale of conformity and otherness, it can also be read as a tale of progress and stagnation. To make her point, the author once more contrasts Poland with France, which for centuries has been a favourite destination for Polish exiles. In France, Leokadia finds herself in a pitiless society that is driven entirely by productivity and profit. Dreaming, a French cow tells her, interferes with milk production (164). Poland, however, does not actually offer an alternative. Kulmowa points out that the hopes that had been pinned on communism as an alternative to capitalist society have proven to be an illusion. When Leokadia returns to her home country, the economic and technical modernization that had deprived her of her job as a carriage horse have further accelerated and now determine people's lives entirely. The city's inhabitants are willing to give up freedom and individuality in exchange for material security and comfort: "We don't want to dream of flying" (206), they declare.

The author uncovers a process of modernization that leaves parts of society behind and is a modernization of society in mere economical terms, accompanied by intellectual conformity, mental stagnation, and restriction of liberty.¹⁹ Poland's efforts of forced industrialization under communist rule, propagated by a language of progress and visions of a bright future for socialist society, came with a radical process of resettlement. People from rural regions were swept into the cities and may have felt just as displaced as Leokadia when she lost her traditional job as a

¹⁸ See, e.g., the novels mentioned above in n. 17 and Maciej Wojtyszko, *Synteza* [Synthesis, 1978].

¹⁹ On the interplay of material benefits and conformist subordination as a central mechanism of communism in Poland after 1956 and on its effects on Polish society see, e.g., Zaremba (2011, 99–101).

carriage horse and tried to wear high heels in order to satisfy the new demands (47).²⁰

In contrast to this economical and technical progress and to communism's narrowly defined vision of man, Leokadia's wings represent mental progress and liberty of the mind. "Who knows what else is inside of me", Leokadia wonders and her friend Aloizy adds that it is just the unexpected in her that he loves best (39).²¹ For Kulmowa the progressiveness of a society is measured by the degree of free development that it grants its individuals. While Leokadia epitomizes this free development, the author also finds an original image for society's mental stagnation: Leokadia's adversary is an elderly widow who preserves everything – including herself – through the use of mothballs.²²

Small-scale Wings: From Pegasus to Grasshopper

In the last chapter, Kulmowa changes her strategy of communication. While she generally directs the perception and sensitivities of her child and adult readers in the same direction, at the end of *Giddyap, Leokadia!* she offers two opposing morals to the story. When Aloizy and Leokadia find themselves rather helpless concerning their future, the wish-fulfilling flower seller reappears. "I don't want to disturb anybody any more by being a winged horse" (210), Leokadia pleads with her, and Leokadia is transformed into a grasshopper. (This involves a Polish pun, as the grasshopper is called *konik polny* – 'little field horse'.) "'You see,' Leokadia teaches Aloizy, sitting on the palm of his hand, 'If one wants to have wings, one has to be that tiny'" (211).

While for the child reader the novel's ending reaffirms the bond between Aloizy and Leokadia and grants the winged horse freedom and protection, the adult reader recognizes a deep pessimism inscribed into the story's outcome: personal freedom comes at a cost and is not to take up any public space at all. There is no room in society for the non-conformist, imaginative mind. Instead of a change of society, it is the "misfits" who have to change in order not to disturb those around them. However, in what could be considered to be an optimistic message even for the adult reader, Leokadia's grasshopper wings may also stand for

²⁰ On the restructuring of society after WW2, see, e.g., Miłosz (1983, 451) and, in greater detail, Leder (2014).

²¹ This idea of a free, unexpected development of the individual recurs in the novel as a leitmotif in the magic flower seller's predictions that eating the magical willow catkins she offers will give Leokadia a (still unpredictable) "CONTINUATION" ("DALSZY CIAĞ" – capital letters in original).

²² Another image that epitomizes the country's stagnation is the town's policeman who so loves to give tickets that he agrees to pay the fines himself. This represents a mockery of a political system in which restrictions have become an end in themselves and of a society that is caught in a circle.

the belief that, even in a world that restricts personal freedom, one can grow wings – even if they have to be very tiny.

Should an era in which the Pegasus – a mythical beast that represents liberty and integrity – experiences a crisis in which it must hide and reduce its wings, not be considered a time of triumph for mythical beasts representing repression and terror, namely for the mythical monster? Not necessarily. Two ambivalent children's books from the early 1960s and the 1980s suggest that it is rather the vanishing of the mythical monster and not its presence that is symptomatic for Poland at the time. However, whether this crisis of the mythical monster allows the readers to feel relief will be discussed in the following.

The Crisis of the Mythical Monster (I): Wiktor Woroszyński's *Cyril, Where Are You?*

The crisis of the mythical monster is a subject in Wiktor Woroszyński's 1962 children's novel *Cyril, Where Are You?*²³ Like Joanna Kulmowa's *Giddyap, Leokadia!* Woroszyński's novel is one of the classics of ambivalent children's literature from the Polish People's Republic.

It is not easy to summarize *Cyril, Where Are You?*, for it is a complex and astonishingly postmodern novel, the absurd character of which is reinforced by drawings of Bohdan Butenko (1931–2019), and the book abounds with historical, political, artistic, and mythological allusions. The latter are generalizing and eclectic, drawing from Graeco-Roman Antiquity as well as from the Bible. The plot is set in contemporary Poland and revolves around the family of Professor Salamander. The Professor is on a scientific excursion to a remote province where the inhabitants claim to have seen a sea snake. Simultaneously his wife, a stewardess, goes missing along with her plane on the way to Paris. Strange things also happen at the Professor's home in the Polish capital. Mysterious calls come in, which are ascribed to the sea snake. The crocodile Cyril that lives in the family's bathtub disappears. Anonymous postcards showing tadpoles arrive and the housekeeper Olimpiada faints after having smelled a red flower. In order to resolve these riddles, the Professor's children, Lutek and Ludka proclaim "Operation Sea Snake", in which they involve their entire surroundings. Before the cause of trouble is – at least seemingly – revealed at the end of the book, the reader witnesses a pseudo-socialist revolution, a power failure, and a house flood as well as the quarrels between different avant-garde artists' groups.

²³ Initially an ardent supporter of the communist doctrine in Poland, Wiktor Woroszyński (1927–1996) became a critic of the communist regime after 1956 and a supporter of the opposition in the 1970s (Bikont and Szczęśna 2006). Besides several novels and poems for children, Woroszyński wrote poems and prose for adults and was an eminent translator of Russian literature (Kozioł 2016).

Despite its intentionally chaotic character, the novel has an underlying structure that consists of the constant confrontation between a mythological world view and a rationalistic-scientific one. Correspondingly, in the course of the novel a mythological and a scientific explanation are offered to answer the question of who was the cause of all the chaos, fear, and terror that the protagonists are faced with (or as they ask themselves, who was the enemy?, Woroszyński 1962, 72). The mythological answer refers to the sea snake, the scientific one – rather uncommonly for a children’s book – to the theory of entropy. At the end of the novel, however, neither of these two explanations will be proven. Woroszyński wilfully challenges both answers as explanatory models and reduces them to mere hypotheses.

The Uncanny at Home: The Vanishing of the Mythical Monster

Initially, the mythological explanation takes the reader to the provinces with Professor Salamander. The scientist’s excursion to track down the sea snake ends in impenetrable fog that renders not only the supposed sea monster, but also the lake in which it is said to dwell, invisible. In addition, the tyrannical pseudo-tsarist head of the nearby village denies the existence of both the sea monster and the lake. The absurd occurrences taking place in the provinces connect the idea of the sea monster explicitly with Russian authoritarian rule and are a sharp satire on a misled socialist revolution. When Professor Salamander persuades the naïve inhabitants of the village to set into motion a rebellion and as a result the tyrant is deposed, the lake becomes visible again, then dries up and leaves nothing behind except disoriented and revengeful inhabitants standing around it (178–180).²⁴ Has the sea monster dissolved with the tyrant’s removal? Or is the supposed existence of a sea monster on the whole pure nonsense as suggested by the Polish name of the lake, Bzdrynie, almost containing the Polish word for ‘nonsense’, *bzdura*?²⁵

²⁴ On the surface of the novel’s storyline it is the vassal of a tsarist regime who is presented as a tyrant and is deposed by a revolution of the people. However, it would be delusional to read the novel as a praise of the socialist revolution. On the one hand, the novel mocks the revolution as dysfunctional, aggressive, and leading nowhere. On the other hand, one has to keep in mind that in Poland communism was not introduced by a revolution of the Polish people, but forced on Poland by the Soviet Union where the ethos of a government of the people had in fact under Stalin long been replaced by an autocratic, pseudo-tsarist dictatorship.

²⁵ The lake’s name Bzdrynie also contains allusions to the Greek word for the Furies, the Erinyes, in Polish *Erynie* (I thank Marek Góralczyk for drawing my attention to this). The name of the goddesses of revenge fits the purpose of the lake well, since after the inhabitants’ revolt has taken place and after the lake has regained water, the revolutionary tribunal revengefully sentences the traitors of the revolution to swimming in the lake (Woroszyński 1962, 173).

Whereas no sea snake can be found in the faraway lake, there are many allusive (not biological!) traces of a sea monster in the Professor's home. For one thing there are the names of the family members: the family's surname Salamander, an amphibian full of mythological allusions, and the son's first name Lucjan, denoting, among other things, a fish species (genus *Lutjanus*). Moreover, one must consider the threatening telephone calls referring to tadpoles, while tadpoles from Lake Bzdrynie even turn up in the Professor's house. And of course, there is the family's crocodile Cyril. While the Professor's family sees in Cyril a harmless creature, the myth-believing housekeeper Olimpiada is convinced that he is a dragon (31).²⁶ Sea snake, dragon, and crocodile: Woroszyński refers to all three biblical descriptions of the Leviathan.²⁷

Reading the novel with the political context of the Polish People's Republic in mind, the name Cyril alludes not only to its Greek origin, meaning 'master' (Pape 1914, 1536–1537) but also to the Russian alphabet, the Cyrillic script. Could the tame crocodile be an echo of the Soviet Leviathan that forced Poland into communism after 1945? But if so, what does it mean that, instead of a huge mythical sea monster, we find ourselves with a domesticated crocodile and with tadpoles in the Professor's apartment? Is this all that is left of the terrifying beast in the 1960s? On the one hand the mythical monster has apparently dissolved into ordinary phenomena – no more than harmless reminiscences of a sea monster. On the other hand, the seed of the monstrous seems to actually have made its way *into* peoples' homes instead of remaining a distant superpower.

Looking for a political reading, I find two ideas contained in the shrinking of the mythical monster and its potential nesting in the niches of the ordinary home. Even though the Soviet satellite states in some respects gained more independence after Stalin's death, the communist system itself did not vanish. There was no guarantee that repressive measures would not again be intensified. Speaking in terms of the novel's allegoric images: the now seemingly harmless crocodile, which started out living in a salad bowl and later had to be moved to the bathtub, might grow further again, perhaps into a dragon or a sea snake. Similarly, the tadpoles infiltrating the house might develop into huge monsters. What for the time being appears tame and peaceful might in fact be a monster in its pupal state. The idea of domestication plays a role in yet another, even more important respect: not only is the crocodile raised and played with by the family, but also the alluding of the names in Professor Salamander's family to aquatic or semi-aquatic creatures points to the fact that terrifying sea monsters are not "the other", but of the same species as those living in fear of them. In his novel Woroszyński provokes a clash

²⁶ Allusions to dragons are also evoked by the name "Polsmokeksport", the name of a company producing pacifiers, with which the Professor's wife tries to calm passengers down during a troubling flight to Paris. *Smok* is the Polish word for 'dragon', while *smoczek* in the diminutive means 'pacifier' (Woroszyński 1962, 148 and 155).

²⁷ See Psalm 74:13–14; Isaiah 27:1; Job 40:25.

between the fear of an alien enemy (“somebody totally unknown”, 72) – a fear provoked by state propaganda – and a threat stemming from the terrified themselves (“Who could be the mysterious X? Nobody knows, but [...] his power is huge. However, the dangers Ludka and Lutek come across on their way result not so much from the nature of X, but from the nature of the Main Heroes [= themselves, K. T.]”, 96).

We will not know from the novel whether there really is a monster, i.e. evil lurking in the house waiting to unfold its full potential. It is remarkable that the crocodile Cyril has no role as an acting character in the novel. He is first and foremost an object of projection. His appearance differs greatly according to the eye of the beholder. Thus Professor Salamander’s seemingly obvious and objective argument, that Cyril “is exactly what he looks like” (237), resolves into obscurity and subjectivity. While the housekeeper Olimpiada perceives Cyril as a dragon, the Professor’s daughter Ludka, who consequently bends reality by substituting it with fantasy, perceives Cyril as a charming being reminiscent of pink soap (8). The two female characters can be seen as an incorporation of two opposite attitudes towards the time they are living in: that of constant mistrust and demonization on the one hand, and that of naïve delusions and a blind supporting of potentially destructive forces on the other.²⁸ The novel reflects a reality in which the boundaries between what is real, what is projection, or what is mere fantasy have dissolved. However, at the end of the novel the narrator tells the reader that for the time being Cyril is “innocently and sweetly snoring” (281) in the bathtub.

“Lady Entropy”: Science, Myth, and the Ordinary

Towards the end of the novel Professor Salamander presents a scientific explanation for the strange things happening around his family and home. Not so much the unproven idea of a mythical sea monster but the scientific theory of entropy seems to provide an answer to the disturbing occurrences related in the novel. The Professor defines entropy as nature’s tendency to extinguish life and to render everything grey and monotonous (262). Both explanations, the mythological one and the scientific one, ascribe responsibility for the things happening to a force so overwhelming that man seems to be powerless in the face of its threat.

The novel’s characters seem to adopt the Professor’s scientific explanation. However, instead of accepting the theory’s abstract conception, they identify entropy with a mysterious lady with a black veil who had been seen around the Professor’s house, causing part of the troubles. The process of demythologizing through science is undone: by identifying entropy with an allegorical figure, the

²⁸ Since the name Ludka contains the Polish word for ‘folk’/‘people’ (‘lud’), it suggests understanding the novel’s character Ludka allegorically.

scientific theory has undergone a process of remythologizing.²⁹ But the ostensible remythologizing has itself a rather demythologizing character, as instead of a mythical monster, entropy is identified with a simple human figure. As with the dissolution of the mythical sea snake in the Professor's home, Woroszyński reduces entropy's totalizing power by transforming it into something ordinary. At the end of the novel, the Professor has to admit that both the mythical sea snake as well as the scientific theory of entropy remain hypotheses so far (279–280). Neither of them is more reliable than the other. The lady in mourning – so similar in imagery to the widow using mothballs in Joanna Kulmowa's novel *Giddyap, Leokadia!* – is an allegory for the ordinary human being. It is not superhuman mythical or natural powers, but human beings who produce terror, numbness, and lifelessness.

Woroszyński's setting off a mythological world view against a scientific one can also be read as a mocking of the communist ideology's aim to replace the stages of mythology and metaphysics with a strictly scientific world view. This glorification of science proved to have a mythical foundation itself and reduced reality to a narrow realm of the positivistically conceivable. In the novel the scientific and the mythological world views – most clearly represented by Professor Salamander and by the housekeeper Olimpiada, respectively – exist alongside each other, they live under the same roof.³⁰

Considering the vanishing of mythical monsters in children's literature written under censorship, one must, of course, take into consideration the possibility of self-censorship engaged in by the authors themselves. They knew that too open a depiction of cruel monsters with political allusions attached to them might prevent the publication of their books. However, Woroszyński's text proves that the subject of the mythical monster's crisis is not so much due to censorship considerations, but rather an apt expression of the author's critical views regarding the situation in Poland at the time: the situation of a people oppressed by forces that are not monstrous any more, but terrible in their ordinary shape.

While the books of Woroszyński and Kulmowa could be published by official publishing houses, another ambivalent children's book of the Polish People's Republic that considers the vanishing of the mythical monster was banned from publication. This is the case with Dorota Terakowska's *The Lord of Lewaw*.

²⁹ “‘It never came to my mind,’ the Professor ponders, ‘that entropy might be a lady in mourning. In principle, it is rather a scientific theory than a person’” (Woroszyński 1962, 261).

³⁰ Professor Salamander and Olimpiada represent two opposing principles that are, however, linked to one other. They are one example of a technique that Woroszyński uses throughout the novel: his characters come in pairs representing two complementing or contradicting aspects of character or *Weltanschauung* (e.g., Ludka and Lutek). Sometimes they are ambivalent in themselves, which does not allow for a quick judgement (e.g., Ludka and her precarious, but at the same time liberating replacement of reality by ideals).

Terakowska's novel for young readers is a story about the crisis of the mythical monster *par excellence*. Therefore, I will use Terakowska's text for my argument, even though the mythical monsters in *The Lord of Lewaw* rather belong to Polish national mythology and the common inventory of fantasy novels than to Graeco-Roman Antiquity. Written in 1982 – a more repressive period of the Polish People's Republic – the book was banned from publication until 1989. Today Terakowska's novel is recommended reading in Polish schools.

The Crisis of the Mythical Monster (II): Dorota Terakowska's
The Lord of Lewaw

Dorota Terakowska³¹ takes up Woroszyński's idea of the mythical monster's dissolution into the ordinary and gives the subject her own twist. *The Lord of Lewaw*³² is a story of the orphan boy Bartek who, when going past the dragon cave under Wawel Hill (Kraków's former royal palace), enters into the mysterious city of Wokark. Wokark is an anagram of Kraków (Krakow). The novel's constant use of anagrams when referring to the world of Wokark signals not only the mirror character of the city, but also that it is a world turned upside down. The city's inhabitants are kept in terror by the lord of Lewaw (an anagram of Wawel) and his army of huge spiders. Since the ruler of Lewaw saps all the courage from Wokark's inhabitants when they are still babies, it is the outsider Bartek who must challenge the tyrant. But what kind of tyrant is this? Nobody has ever seen him. He is referred to as "the Nameless" and his authority is maintained by his troops of willing executioners and through the fact that nobody knows who he is. Thus, he turns into an object of legend and fear-ridden monstrous projections. This becomes obvious when Bartek arrives at the tyrant's castle in order to fight him. In rapid succession, Bartek is confronted with a gigantic snake and a dragon. However, as the terrified boy does not give in to his immediate impulse to flee, but instead continues walking courageously towards the monsters, they vanish. Eventually, Bartek does not find yet another, even more terrifying-looking monster on the throne of the castle, but rather a withered old man. "'Is that you...?' Bartek shouts in disbelief. '[...] You are so small? So weak? Terrified? You, the Nameless?'" (Terakowska 1998, 89).

³¹ Dorota Terakowska (1938–2004) studied sociology and worked as a journalist. At first a member of the Polish United Workers' Party, she later became a supporter of the opposition and protested against the imposition of martial law in 1981. Dismissed from her work as a journalist for political reasons, Terakowska started to write books. Most of them were only released several years after they had been written. Terakowska is one of the best-known Polish authors of contemporary crossover literature addressing a readership of children and adults alike. On Terakowska's biography see Mafutala-Makuch (2014, 5–13).

³² Page numbers in the text refer to the 1998 edition.

When interpreting this figure of a decrepit tyrant with regard to the historical context, the successions of old men leading the communist parties of the Soviet Union and Poland come to mind, and especially the image of General Wojciech Jaruzelski, who was responsible for the imposition of martial law in Poland just one year before the novel was written. Jaruzelski then defended his decision to put his country under a repressive military regime for nearly two years with the argument that this was the only way to prevent Poland from being invaded by the Soviet Union. Jaruzelski's defence echoes the justification used by the tyrant in Terakowska's novel: all his repressive and fear-inducing measures, the tyrant argues, were meant to preserve peace in his town (91).³³

In spite of the obvious differences between Terakowska's morally uplifting tale and Woroszyński's ambiguous novel, both texts use the topic of the vanishing mythical monster and its dissolution into the ordinary to examine the fear-inducing projective character of power and to show their readers the ambivalence of their own nature,³⁴ as well as to encourage them to fight their fears.

Conclusion

What are we left with after Wiktor Woroszyński and Dorota Terakowska have demythologized the mythical monster in ambivalent Polish children's literature and the Pegasus in Joanna Kulmowa's novel has had its wings shrunk? Instead of powerful sea snakes and dragons the reader is left with a sclerotic old man, a mourning lady in black, a widow smelling of mothballs, and a tame crocodile.

The crisis of the mythical monster on the one hand signals that evil powers, shrunken and ordinary, are not (any longer) invincible. On the other hand, their being ordinary does not mean that they are harmless. The novels analyzed here are particularly radical in that they show the overwhelming power of figures that no longer bear the appearance of monsters. It is the terror coming from the ordinary human being that keeps people under control and deprives them of their freedom. The monsters may have shrunk, but the wings of the Pegasus, incorporating freedom and the potential for people's individual development, have shrunk too. We are left with the image of a sclerotic society forced into conformity and numbness.

³³ The reference to Poland's imposition of martial law is underpinned by the fact that Bartek is *thirteen*-year-old (Terakowska 1998, 92) and that it is his *thirteenth* escape from the orphanage that leads him to Wokark (6). Martial law was imposed in Poland on 13 December 1981.

³⁴ On the ambivalent character of the oppressed people in Terakowska's novel, see Beczyńska (1996, 20–21).

Could it be that I have done an injustice to the children's books I have analyzed in this chapter? Have I forced onto them an unwarranted political (over)interpretation?³⁵ The answer may be both yes and no. In analyzing these novels, I have put on very dark glasses and I have deprived, in particular, Kulmowa's and Woroszyński's works of their most outstanding feature: the fact that they are written in a hilariously funny way. The inventiveness and exuberant fantasy contained in the books of both authors are in themselves a statement against monotony and conformity. The books do not force politics on children and adults, but they give the grown-up reader food for thought and may serve – as shown above – as a springboard for a variety of political and historical allusions. The wit of the mythical beasts and the crises they experience reveal themselves primarily in their historical and political context. At the same time, however, it is exactly the mythical elements that take the novels beyond their historical and cultural context and make them rewarding reading even today.

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³⁵ On the question of whether everything in ambivalent children's literature written under censorship has to be read as a symbol, or whether this leads to an over-interpretation, see Leszczyński (2003, 90). On the question of whether Aesopian language is an element of the text or of the reader's reception, see Głowiński (2004, 70).

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SIMON J. G. BURTON

A Narnian “Allegory of Love”: The Pegasus in C. S. Lewis’ *Chronicles of Narnia*

Planet Narnia

In a learned article on medieval poetry written in 1935, C. S. Lewis, the great Christian scholar and writer, wrote the following suggestive sentence:

[...] the characters of the planets, as conceived by medieval astrology, seem to me to have a permanent value as spiritual symbols – to provide a *Phänomenologie des Geistes* which is specially worth while in our own generation. (1980, 24)¹

As if to prove his point, Lewis appended to this article a poem he himself had written called “The Planets” (1980, 24–26). In this he offers a poetic voyage through the pre-Copernican cosmos that he was later to write of so charmingly in *The Discarded Image* (1971, 92–121). Beginning from Earth, which lies at the geographical centre but spiritual rim (58),² we ascend upwards through the spheres of the Moon, Mercury, and Venus to the Sun and then beyond to Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn before reaching what Lewis called “the rim of the round welkin” (1980, 26), the gateway into the Empyrean itself, which in Dante’s *Paradiso* (28.40–78) is the dwelling of God and all the blessed, and the true centre of the universe.³

For readers of Lewis’ *Cosmic Trilogy*, his fascination with the “great dance” of the heavenly bodies hardly comes as a surprise. Indeed, the *Trilogy* itself ends with the dramatic descent of the Planets – re-envisioned by Lewis as angelic rulers created by Maleldil the Most High God – to Earth (*That Hideous Strength*, 1989, 685–693).⁴ What may come as much more of a surprise is Michael Ward’s

¹ For extensive discussion of this work see Ward (2008, 23–41).

² For evidence of this theological inverting of the cosmological relation between centre and periphery Lewis pointed to Alan of Lille (1908) and Dante (*Paradiso* 28.40–78).

³ For an engaging exploration of Dante’s metaphysical view of the Empyrean, see Moevs (2005). For Lewis’ fascination with Dante, see Daigle-Williamson (2015).

⁴ For Lewis’ favourite phrase “the great dance”, see his *Perelandra*, the second book in *The Cosmic Trilogy* (1989, 340–344).

claim in his *Planet Narnia* that the seven medieval planets represent the “secret imaginative key” to Lewis’ most celebrated work – the seven volumes of the *Chronicles of Narnia*. While the Christian, allegorical dimension of the *Chronicles* is apparent to all but the youngest readers, Ward argues persuasively that readers and scholars alike have missed the crucial symbolic dimension. Drawing on the 1936 *Allegory of Love* (Lewis 2013, 56–58) he points to Lewis’ vital distinction between allegory as a transposing of the immaterial to the material realm and symbolism as a reading of the immaterial in the material. Understood symbolically, each book of the *Chronicles* can be seen to evoke – and the word needs to be understood in the strongest possible sense – the atmosphere of one of the seven medieval planets, and in doing so point beyond them to God as the symbolic centre around which they all revolve (Ward 2008, 23–39).

Ward’s claim has found a near unanimous acceptance among Lewis scholars and resonates with thoughtful readers of the *Chronicles*.⁵ It has also opened up a completely new perspective on the rich mythological allusions within the *Chronicles*. Building on this, this chapter will consider the way in which Lewis entwines classical and Christian motifs in his reworking of the Pegasus myth in *The Magician’s Nephew*, published in 1955 (Lewis 1997a).

The Narnian Cosmogony

The Magician’s Nephew is the literary gate into Narnia. It tells of the origin of the land of Narnia itself and of its subsequent corruption, and hints at its ultimate redemption. It is thus the Narnian cosmogony, and the work in which Lewis – retrospectively, it must be said, for it was almost the last of the *Chronicles* to be written⁶ – begins to unfold the mythic and theological themes which bind the world of Narnia, and indeed all worlds, together.

The Magician’s Nephew is the Narnian book written under Venus and, as Ward has shown, is shot through with Venusian allusions. In this work the divine Lion Aslan, who for Lewis is not just a Christ-character but is intended to be Christ himself, symbolizes what Ward has called the “Venereal Logos” – the divine Word seen as refracted through Venus herself (Ward 2008, 164–189). Yet while Aslan is the primary evocation of Venus in *The Magician’s Nephew*, there

⁵ For approbation of Ward’s work see, e.g., Peters (2008).

⁶ The best reading order of the *Chronicles* remains hotly disputed. *The Magician’s Nephew* (1997a, 170–171) clearly recognizes the existence of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950) and was obviously one of the last read by the original readers. However, in a letter written to an eleven-year-old boy in 1957 Lewis himself recommended starting with *The Magician’s Nephew* and then moving on to *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and other books, following the order of the Narnian chronology, although he conceded that “perhaps it does not matter very much in which order anyone reads them” (Lewis 1995, 68).

is a good case to be made that Strawberry, the London cab-horse who becomes Fledge – the first Narnian Pegasus and the “father of all flying horses” (Lewis 1997a, 133) – was also intended by Lewis as a symbol of the Venusian spirit.⁷ For in his account of Strawberry’s transformation we see him using a rich array of biblical and mythological sources to present his own, Narnian, “allegory of love” in a manner which still remains intuitively accessible even to the youngest of his readers.⁸

For those not familiar with *The Magician’s Nephew* it will be necessary to give just the briefest overview of the story. It is set in late Victorian London and its hero and heroine are Digory, whose mother is dying, and his friend Polly. At the beginning of the story Digory and Polly discover magical rings created by Digory’s Uncle Andrew, the wicked magician of the title. Using them they travel to the “Wood between the Worlds” and through this to the realm of Charn. Here Digory defies a warning and inadvertently wakes up an evil Witch who journeys back with them to London. After a series of adventures, Digory, Uncle Andrew, the Witch, and Frank, a London cab driver, with his horse Strawberry end up arriving in Narnia as it is being created by the Great Lion Aslan.

Here they witness the creation of Narnia and Strawberry himself is chosen to become one of the first talking animals. On being told by Aslan that he has awoken an ancient evil, Digory is sent together with Polly and Strawberry, now Fledge the winged horse, to find a silver apple in a magical garden. After successfully resisting the Witch’s temptation to steal it from Aslan and use it to heal his dying mother, Digory returns to Aslan where he is instructed to plant the apple, which instantly becomes a tree for the protection of Narnia. Then, in a wonderful reversal, Digory is given an apple to heal his mother. Later this apple is planted in our world and from the tree that springs from it a magical wardrobe is produced which becomes a gateway back to Narnia. However, that, as they say, is a story for another time. For now let us return to our hero Strawberry.

From Strawberry to Fledge

We first meet Strawberry as a crazed horse. The Witch, who has turned the hansom cab into a chariot, is whipping and goading him into fury. Leaping astride the horse, she speaks words into his ear which enrage him even further

⁷ Strawberry is introduced in chapter seven of *The Magician’s Nephew* and transforms into Fledge in chapter twelve (cf. Lewis 1997a, 82 and 133–135). Ward does not discuss Fledge as an incarnating of the Venusian spirit, although he does allude very briefly to his copper colour as an example of Venusian imagery (Ward 2008, 182).

⁸ Lewis (2013, 58) emphasized the “antithesis” between the modes of symbol and allegory. However, Ward rightly points out that this contrast should not be seen as absolute and that “Lewis’s allegorizing intellect and symbolic imagination were mutually and fruitfully engaged” in the *Chronicles* (Ward 2008, 231–232).

(Lewis 1997a, 82). The dramatic picture not only recalls the “night-mare” of European witchlore but also the Lutheran picture of the sinner as a horse ridden by the Devil (cf. Luther 1873, VII, 157). As Ward points out, the Witch represents what Lewis understood as the “Venus Infernal” (Ward 2008, 179), the inverted image of Aslan, the heavenly Venus.⁹ Where Aslan represents charity, that love which spends and gives itself, the Witch and Uncle Andrew represent a fallen love which has turned in upon itself (178–179, 189). The Witch, like her ancestress Lilith – the mythical first wife of Adam who joined forces with the evil Serpent and bore his demonic offspring – has become beguiled by her own beauty and wants to usurp Aslan’s place as goddess of her own world.¹⁰ In fact, as Lewis suggests, she is even willing to be damned rather than submit to Aslan’s love (Lewis 1997a, 162–163). In placing Strawberry under her literal sway, Lewis is therefore symbolically showing us sin as a state of bondage to corrupted love – and indeed it is significant that more than once in the later narrative Strawberry’s life before Narnia is described as one of slavery (114, 129).

It is when Strawberry is magically transported to the Wood between the Worlds that we begin to see his transformation. While the Wood is a terrible place for the Witch and Uncle Andrew, it calms and soothes Strawberry and returns him to his normal self. Freed from the Witch’s influence, the thirsty horse is drawn to drink from one of the world-pools (89–90). For Lewis the desire for God is a natural desire, a thirst shared by all humanity.¹¹ Strawberry’s desire to drink, described significantly as “the most natural thing in the world” (90), symbolizes this desire, and gestures towards other places in the *Chronicles* where Lewis uses the biblical imagery of water to the same end, most notably a famous scene in *The Silver Chair* which recalls the story of Jesus and the Woman at the Well (Lewis 1997d, 22–24; cf. John 4:1–45). In plunging into this pool, in abandoning himself to the desire welling up inside him, Strawberry unwittingly, through the plot device of the magical rings, opens the gateway into Narnia. On hearing Aslan’s song – the song which proves so hateful to the Witch and Uncle Andrew – Strawberry is described as giving “the sort of whinny a horse would give if, after years of being a cab-horse, it found itself back in the old field where

⁹ The idea of two Venuses, or Aphrodites, is found in Plato’s *Symposium* 180d, where the character Pausanias speaks of the heavenly Aphrodite, daughter of Ouranos, and the “common” Aphrodite, daughter of Zeus. The distinction between the goddesses is not, as for Lewis, between good and evil, but between noble and indiscriminate love.

¹⁰ Lewis informs us that the Witch is descended from Lilith, the first wife of Adam, who was “one of the Jinn”, and that “there isn’t a drop of real human blood in the Witch” (1997b, 76). Lilith was also an important character in the eponymous 1895 novel *Lilith* written by George MacDonald, whom Lewis regarded as his literary and spiritual mentor. For the connection between Lewis and MacDonald see Marshall (1991).

¹¹ In this he shows important affinities with the theology of the High Middle Ages and especially Thomas Aquinas. See further Henri de Lubac (1998).

it had played as a foal, and saw someone whom it remembered and loved coming across the field to bring it a lump of sugar” (Lewis 1997a, 90). For Augustine in his *Confessions* (10.20.29–22.32), all humans have a kind of innate memory of happiness manifest in their shared desire for God. While he has never met him, Strawberry too remembers Aslan and knows him instinctively as his beloved Master.

Strawberry’s transformation from a “dumb beast” to a talking animal – mirrored in Lewis’ deliberate switch in pronoun from “it” to “him”¹² – comes when he first encounters Aslan face to face. Chosen by Aslan where others were passed by – an Augustinian reminder of the gratuity of grace – Strawberry joins the other elect animals making a circle around him. As Aslan gazes upon them, staring at them so hard “as if he was going to burn them up with his mere stare” (Lewis 1997a, 107), the animals begin to change. Not only do the small animals become bigger and the big animals smaller, but they begin to return his gaze “as if they were trying very hard to understand” (108). Then something remarkable happens:

The Lion opened his mouth, but no sound came from it; he was breathing out, a long, warm breath; it seemed to sway all the beasts as the wind sways a line of trees. Far overhead from beyond the veil of blue sky which hid them the stars sang again; a pure, cold difficult music. Then there came a swift flash like fire (but it burnt nobody) either from the sky or from the Lion itself, and every drop of blood tingled in the children’s bodies, and the deepest, wildest voice they had ever heard was saying: “Narnia, Narnia, Narnia, awake. Love. Think. Speak. Be walking trees. Be talking beasts. Be divine waters.” (108)

As Ward argues, here Lewis fuses – even con-fuses – biblical imagery of creation and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit with the mythological descent of Venus. For we are purposely left in doubt whether the flash of Pentecostal fire came from Aslan or out of the heavens (Ward 2008, 180–181, 187). Yet such a melding of images makes perfect sense when we remember that charity, identified in the early Middle Ages as the Holy Spirit, was the “translunary virtue” associated by Dante and the wider medieval tradition with the sphere of Venus (*Paradiso* 9.103–111).¹³ In this way, Lewis’ planetary mythology has allowed him to use Strawberry and the other talking animals to paint a vivid Christologi-

¹² See the passage concerning Strawberry’s transformation (Lewis 1997a, 133–134), although Lewis is not entirely consistent in his use of pronouns (e.g., 1997a, 87).

¹³ Following Augustine, Peter Lombard in his famous *Sentences* argued for the identity of charity with the Holy Spirit. Later medieval theologians affirmed the intimate connection but denied the identity. Lewis in *That Hideous Strength* speaks of Venus as “the translunary virtue, fallen upon them direct from the Third Heaven, unmitigated” (1989, 689). The connection between Venus and charity is explored in Ward (2008, 180–189).

cal and Trinitarian picture of the awakening of love by the gaze of the God who is Love – an image recalling the opening of the *De visione Dei* of the fifteenth-century German theologian Nicholas of Cusa, one of Lewis' favourite mystics.¹⁴

Of all the talking animals it is Strawberry who is the first to address Aslan on a personal level. When all the animals respond in a chorus of praise to Aslan saying, "Hail Aslan. We hear and obey. We are awake. We love. We think. We speak. We know", it is Strawberry who adds, "in a nosey and snorty kind of voice": "But please, we don't know very much yet" (Lewis 1997a, 109). Strawberry's dependence on Aslan is reiterated later in the narrative. Knowing that Digory needs help to accomplish his great task, Aslan turns to Strawberry and asks him if he would like to be a winged horse. Strawberry is overjoyed but his response is one of pure humility: "If you wish Aslan – if you really mean – I don't know why it should be me – I'm not a very clever horse" (Lewis 1997a, 133). In submitting to Aslan's will Strawberry thus opens the way for his final transformation:

"Be winged. Be the father of all flying horses," roared Aslan in a voice that shook the ground. "Your name is Fledge." The horse shied, just as it might have shied in the old, miserable days when it pulled a hansom. Then it roared. It strained its neck back as if there were a fly biting its shoulders and it wanted to scratch them. And then, just as the beasts had burst out of the earth, there burst out from the shoulders of Fledge wings that spread and grew, larger than eagles', larger than swans', larger than angels' wings in church windows. The feathers shone chestnut colour and copper colour. He gave a great sweep with them and leaped into the air. (133–134)

When asked by Aslan whether it is good, Strawberry responds, "it is very good, Aslan" (134). Here the counterpoint between "good" and "very good" irresistibly reminds us of Genesis 1, and is a literary signal that Fledge – who like all God's chosen has also been given a new name – has now become a divine-image bearer himself.

Such an impression is reinforced by another subtle planetary allusion. When Fledge gains his wings they are copper coloured, and copper, as Lewis'

¹⁴ Nicholas of Cusa, *De visione Dei* 5.10.14 (1932–2005, VI, 17–18). Lewis wrote a poem about Nicholas of Cusa entitled "On a Theme from Nicolas of Cusa" (1964, 70). In book 2 of *De docta ignorantia* 2.12.162 (1932–2005, I, 103–104), his most famous work, Cusa offered an important theological exploration of cosmology. Cusa's understanding here of God as an infinite sphere whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere, itself stemming from the Neo-Platonic *Book of the Twenty-Four Philosophers* (Anon. 2006), and his intriguing anticipation of Copernican cosmology resonate with Lewis' own theocentric cosmology. In particular, Lewis' *Perelandra* climaxes with a hymn of praise to God with clear Cusan affinities (cf. Lewis 1989, 340–346). The link between Lewis and Cusa is one deserving of much more exploration.

Discarded Image informs us (1971, 107), was the metal of Venus herself.¹⁵ As a line in “The Planets” expresses this, “the metal of copper in the mine reddens / With muffled brightness, like muted gold, / By her finger form’d” (Lewis 1980, 25). Metallurgical transformations were an important symbol of divine grace in medieval and Renaissance thought and are made use of elsewhere in the *Chronicles*.¹⁶ In making himself a self-offering to Aslan – recalling the strawberries supposedly offered in the Roman Temple of Venus (cf. Roth 1997, 441) – Strawberry becomes in-formed by Aslan himself. Recalling the late medieval pattern of the “imitation of Christ”, and even more Nicholas of Cusa’s paradigm of *Christiformitas*, Strawberry’s transformation symbolizes the believer’s conversion by faithful humility and charity into the living form of Christ.¹⁷ Indeed, it is significant that when we meet him again, at the very end of the *Chronicles*, Fledge can address even the Kings and Queens of Narnia as his “cousins” (Lewis 1997e, 167).

Fledge’s transformation also serves as a dramatic counterpoint to the narrative of Uncle Andrew, who all his life remains under the spell of the Witch, the infernal Venus. For although he is given a chance to change his ways when he first hears Aslan’s song and recognizes it for what it is, his repulsion means that it eventually loses all meaning for him. As Aslan himself says, “he has made himself unable to hear my voice” (Lewis 1997a, 158). As a result he descends into the bestial. In the episode of the talking animals mistaking him for a “dumb beast”, the process of dehumanization that Lewis presented in a chilling way in *Perelandra* (first publ. 1943) and *That Hideous Strength* (first publ. 1945) is here given a comic twist (Lewis 1997a, 116–124).¹⁸ Yet, in rejecting love and Aslan, the reader is made to see that a dumb beast is precisely what Uncle Andrew has become. By contrast, Strawberry has come under the spell of that heavenly Venus who bewitches the worlds, to allude to another line of “The Planets” (“Venus [...], / Whose breasts and brow, and her breath’s sweetness / Bewitch the

¹⁵ Copper (*cuprum*) is associated with Cyprus, the island of Aphrodite; cf. Cyrino (2010, 66).

¹⁶ See throughout Ward (2008, 42–213). Lewis in *The Discarded Image* refers to the importance of metallurgical transformation in medieval and Renaissance literature (1971, 105–109). A striking example of the fusion between alchemy and grace can be seen in Nicholas of Cusa, “Sermo”, 241.1–20 (2008, 342–351).

¹⁷ See Kempis 2004, ch. 1, and Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia*, 3.11.252 (1932, I, 156). For Cusa’s understanding of *Christiformitas*, see Miller (2012) and Izbicki (2011).

¹⁸ Lewis in *Perelandra* presents the scientist Weston, an anti-Christ figure, as the “Un-Man” (1989, 292–309). In *That Hideous Strength* there is a tragi-comic parallel to the scene in *The Magician’s Nephew* when the animals from the experimental zoo at Belbury escape and kill their captors (710–720). Lewis (2001) reflected on the themes of scientism and dehumanization.

worlds”, Lewis 1980, 24), and as a result ascends with Aslan on wings of speech and love.

The Flight of Pegasus

Unlike Pegasus, the son of the horse god Poseidon, Strawberry is not born divine, but rather, as we have seen, becomes a divine-image bearer. Yet while Strawberry is not captured by a golden bridle – but is rather set free by being captured by Aslan – there is a real sense in which he needs to be tamed before he can be ridden by Digory. For it is in “bridling” his will to that of Aslan himself, something he does willingly and joyfully, that he becomes the means to accomplish Digory’s quest and safeguard all of Narnia. Indeed, it is precisely here that we begin to see the vital difference from the myth of Pegasus and Bellerophon. For while Bellerophon rides the subdued Pegasus proudly up to Olympus against the will of Zeus, thinking it is his divine birthright to live among the gods, Digory rides the liberated Fledge to Paradise at Aslan’s command and with his blessing. In fact, Aslan specifically warns Fledge not to “fly too high” or to go over the top of the mountains, but rather to fly through the valleys – a symbol of humility in the writings of the Christian mystics (cf., e.g., Ruusbroec 1916, vol. I, ch. 6, 18–19) – and to keep to the path that he has laid out for them (Lewis 1997a, 135). Finally, while we find no gad-fly in this story, we do see Strawberry in his transformation behaving like a fly has bitten his shoulders. This is not the sting of Zeus’ anger, but is rather the “divine sting” of Aslan’s charity (cf. Atsma 2000–2019b).

The veiled allusion to the gad-fly reminds us not only of Plato’s Socrates, the Athenian gad-fly, but more especially of the Platonic notion of Eros. Indeed, it is Plato, in a celebrated passage of his *Phaedrus*, who provides not only Lewis but the whole of the Christian tradition with the vital link between the Pegasus myth and the mystical ascent of love. Here he speaks, “in a figure”, of the soul as a charioteer driving two winged horses. In the divine soul of the gods, both winged horses are noble, allowing them to “soar upwards” beyond the heavens to the transcendent realm of the Ideas. By contrast, the human soul, whose two steeds are unequally yoked, faces a continual struggle between the noble horse which desires to ascend and the ignoble horse pulling the whole team back down to earth. As Plato explains:

πέφυκεν ἡ πτεροῦ δύναμις τὸ ἐμβριθεῖς ἄγειν ἄνω μετεωρίζουσα ἢ τὸ τῶν θεῶν γένος οἰκεῖ, κεκοινώνηκε δὲ πη μάλιστα τῶν περὶ τὸ σῶμα τοῦ θεοῦ ψυχῇ, τὸ δὲ θεῖον καλόν, σοφόν, ἀγαθόν, καὶ πᾶν ὅτι τοιοῦτον· τοῦτοις δὴ τρέφεται τε καὶ αὔξεται μάλιστα γὰρ τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς πτέρωμα, αἰσχροῦ δὲ καὶ κακῶ καὶ τοῖς ἐναντίοις φθίνει τε καὶ διόλλυται. (*Phdr.* 246d–e)

The wing is the corporeal element which is most akin to the divine, and which by nature tends to soar aloft and carry that which gravitates downwards into the upper region, which is the habitation of the gods. The divine is beauty, wisdom, goodness, and the like; and by these the wing of the soul is nourished, and grows apace; but when fed upon evil and foulness and the opposite of good, wastes and falls away.¹⁹

As he goes on to describe, the soul’s wings sprout as it gazes on its lover. As it receives the “effluence of his beauty”, it experiences an “unusual heat and perspiration” and a “feeling of uneasiness and tickling” which, in the absence of the beloved, pricks and pierces and even maddens the soul (Plato, *Phdr.* 251b–c).

Here the language of gazing certainly reminds us of the reciprocal gaze between Aslan and the elect beasts, the language of the heat of their transformation into talking animals and the language of the prickling and madness of the sprouting of Strawberry’s wings. Yet how are we to make sense of the ascent to a Garden? From the text it is clear that the Garden is inspired by both biblical and classical sources. From the Christian tradition it clearly references the Garden of Eden, although here Lewis is recapitulating and in a sense reversing the Fall narrative of the Bible. It is also clearly inspired by Dante’s account in the *Purgatorio* (28–33) of the Earthly Paradise at the top of Mount Purgatory. From the classical tradition, as many commentators have recognized, it is a clear reference to the Garden of the Hesperides. For like the Garden of the Hesperides it is located in the Utmost West, contains apples which grant immortality, and has a watchful guardian. While in Lewis’ Garden the apples are silver and the guardian is a Phoenix not a Drakon – he perhaps did not want to be too obvious about his mythical sources! – Ward has pointed out that Lewis’ description of the slit-eyed watchfulness of the Phoenix recalls Milton’s dragon of his “Comus” (lines 393–395; Milton 2003, 99) who with “unenchanted eye” guards the “fair Hesperian tree” (Ward 2008, 183). Moreover, the Christological symbolism of the Phoenix reminds us of God’s watchful presence in the Garden of Eden and heightens the drama of the “terrible choice” that Digory faces there, and which Lewis held in some way confronts us all.²⁰

Indeed, on recalling a line from Pindar’s *Isthmian Odes* (7.44–48) – “winged Pegasus threw his master Bellerophon, who wanted to go to the dwelling-places of heaven and the company of Zeus. A thing that is sweet beyond measure is awaited by a most bitter end”²¹ – the connection must have seemed nigh irresistible for him. For in the *Magician’s Nephew* it is the Witch who defies the warning on the Gate of the Garden and climbs over a wall to steal an apple of

¹⁹ Trans. Benjamin Jowett in Plato (1953, 153).

²⁰ The intense spiritual drama of personal choice can be best illustrated from a striking passage in Lewis (1982, 60–64).

²¹ Trans. Diane Arnsperg Crichton in Pindar (1990). In 1949 Lewis wrote a poem on Pindar called “Pindar Sang” (1964, 15–17).

unimaginable sweetness and gain the prize of immortality. Yet, as Aslan tells us at the end of the book, she has gained her heart's desire only at the cost of despair and damnation. The same would have been true if Digory had stolen an apple to heal his mother. She would have recovered but only at the cost of both their happiness, and indeed the happiness of Narnia itself. As Aslan expresses it, in what could almost be a paraphrase of Pindar, "that is what happens to those who pluck and eat fruits at the wrong time and in the wrong way. The fruit is good, but they loathe it ever after" (Lewis 1997a, 162).²² By contrast, Digory in placing Aslan's desire above his own discovers the true fulfilment of his own will. Indeed, he truly gains his heart's desire, for in a wonderful reversal he gains not only his mother's healing but Aslan himself (162–165).

Let us also remember that Lewis had good classical precedent for linking Pegasus to the Garden of Hesperides specifically. For Hesiod in his *Theogony* (270–290) had spoken of the dwelling place of Medusa, Pegasus' mother, and the other Gorgons as being "in the utmost place toward night, by the singing Hesperides".²³ This hint had most likely led the much later Scholiast of Apollonius of Rhodes to suggest that Phorcys and Ceto, in Hesiod the parents of both Medusa and the Hesperidean Drakon, were also the parents of the Hesperides themselves, the beautiful nymphs of sunset. Finally, the early medieval poet Fulgentius, who as Lewis writes in the *Allegory of Love* (2013, 105–106) was famous (or notorious) for his Christian allegorical renderings of Virgil and other classical writers, had boldly identified Medusa herself as the fourth nymph of the Hesperides. While to a purist this might seem a dubious link in the mythological chain, to Lewis, who lived his life immersed in late classical and medieval sources, it gave Pegasus himself a lineage back to the nymphs of Hespera, who in some late sources became regarded as the offspring of Venus-Hespera herself.²⁴

If there could be any doubt about all these connections, let us remember that in *Perelandra* when the hero Ransom awakes on the planet Venus to see a fruit tree with a dragon-like serpent coiled round it, he thinks himself to be in the Garden of the Hesperides. This leads him to wonder if all our myths are just realities scattered through other worlds (Lewis 1989, 182–183).²⁵ This is dramatically confirmed at the end of the book when, after having averted the fall of Tor

²² Indeed, that Lewis made this connection between the Hesperides and Pindar is evident from his poem "Pindar Sang", which references a country discovered by Herakles "at the other side of the North Wind", in which one is "struck with sweet desire". Yet in this land, as in the Garden in *The Magician's Nephew*, one will find that "[o]f unattainable longings sour is the fruit" (Lewis 1964, 16–17).

²³ Trans. Richmond Lattimore in Hesiod (1959, 139–140).

²⁴ For a detailed discussion of the classical sources for the Garden of the Hesperides and its nymphs see Atsma (2000–2019a).

²⁵ See also Lewis (1989, 328), where he says: "[...] our mythology is based on a solid reality than we dream: but is also at an almost infinite distance from that base".

and Tinidril, the Venusian Adam and Eve, he climbs up to a sacred garden and meets Venus herself (322–329). The description of this garden immediately recalls the Western Garden of *The Magician’s Nephew*. Indeed, as Ward has suggested, Lewis’ account of the journey to the Western Garden deliberately evokes a Venusian atmosphere, and indeed does so quite literally in the unbearably sweet air which Lewis associated with Venus’ realm (Ward 2008, 183; Lewis 1997a, 144). It is worth noting, however, that Lewis is here also at pains to convey a Hesperan mood. For Fledge’s journey takes him straight into the setting sun and into the western sky become “like one great furnace full of melted gold” (Lewis 1997a, 138). The valley in which they first land is in the heart of the mountains, one of which “looking rose-red in the reflections of the sunset, towered above them” (139). As he described evening coming over them and the children gazing up at “the bright young stars of that new world” (141), Lewis must have really had to resist the temptation to include the evening star herself among them. Yet in a very real sense he did not have to. For the children, safe and snug under the protection of Fledge’s wings, Venus is not far away.

Conclusion

In Petrus Berchorius’ *Ovidius moralizatus* of the fourteenth century, the myth of Pegasus is given a distinctively Christian rendering. In it, Berchorius, who sees the whole of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* as an allegory of the soul’s ascent to God, takes up the tradition of the two riders of Pegasus: Bellerophon and Perseus. For Berchorius, Bellerophon unsurprisingly represents the pride and arrogance of man in seeking to make himself God – the pride which leads to the mighty fall. By contrast, he reads Perseus mounted on Pegasus as an allegory of Christ’s Resurrection and Ascension to heaven (Steadman 1958). For Lewis there are also two riders of Fledge. His Bellerophon is the Witch, the charioteer who nearly drives Strawberry to his destruction and the one whose pride leads to a bitter end. His Perseus is Digory, the one who conquers the ancient serpent in the garden – the Witch as Medusa – and having slain his old self – the self that awakened the sleeping Witch – wings his way back to Aslan himself, borne upwards by “the weight of love” (Lewis 1997a, 146–153, 161–163).²⁶

We must remember, however, that Digory, unlike Lucy and Susan in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, rides Fledge and not Aslan (Lewis 1997b, 149–150).²⁷ Yet there is undoubtedly a sense in which Lewis viewed Aslan him-

²⁶ For the concept of the weight of love, used by Augustinians, see, most famously, Augustine, *Confessions* 13.9.10.

²⁷ The award-winning 1988 BBC television serial of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* aptly, but almost certainly unwittingly, expressed this picture of Aslan as the Divine Pegasus by making Aslan fly with Lucy and Susan on his back. Interestingly, they also included a Pegasus in his royal court.

self as the Divine Pegasus. We may see this from *The Horse and His Boy* in a scene which Ward has described as “the most explicitly Trinitarian moment in the entire Narniad” and one of the theological “high points” of all of Lewis’ writings (Ward 2008, 158). Riding through a mountain pass to the rescue of Narnia, the hero Shasta enters into a thick cloud where, unknowingly, he meets Aslan himself. Aslan tells him that the many lions he has met on his journey are the One Lion. When Shasta asks him who he is, Aslan replies:

“Myself,” said the voice, very deep and low so that the earth shook: and again “Myself,” loud and clear and gay: and then the third time “Myself,” whispered so softly that you could hardly hear it, and yet it seemed to come from all around you as if the leaves rustled with it. (Lewis 1997c, 130)

Here the threefold repetition – the Narnian Trisagion – echoes not only the divine name – “I am who I am” – of Exodus 3:14 but also the three persons of the one name of the Trinitarian formula of Matthew 28:19. Yet what is particularly fascinating for us is that when the mist clears from around Shasta, after Aslan departs, he sees in the ground the Lion’s paw-print out of which a spring of fresh water is flowing (Lewis 1997c, 130–132).

The Horse and His Boy is the Narnian book written under Mercury and it therefore comes as no surprise to find Pegasus, whom Shakespeare had called that “feathered Mercury” (*Henry IV*, part I, act 4, scene 1) making an incognito appearance. For, as Lewis well knew, in classical mythology Pegasus was not only the horse of Venus but was also the horse of the Muses, and thus by extension of Mercury himself, the god of all language and poetry.²⁸ Indeed, his account of the spring flowing from Aslan’s paw-print, while it certainly echoes accounts of the miracles of Exodus, has its closest precedent in the legend of the Muses and the Hippocrene spring. This tells the story of a singing contest between the Muses and the daughters of Pierus. When the Muses sang, heaven, the sea, and all the rivers stopped to listen and Mount Helicon itself began to rise up to heaven in delight. Pegasus kicked it to stop it rising and where his hoof left its print, the inspiring waters of the Hippocrene spring began to flow (cf. Ovid *Met.* 5.256–264 and Antonius Liberalis 1992, 60 [tale 9]). For Shasta too “it took one’s breath away to think of the weight that could make a footprint like that” – the “weight of glory” pressing down on the whole world itself (Lewis 1997c, 132). Likewise, Aslan’s spring becomes for him a source of refreshment and inspiration in his journey towards the salvation of Narnia (131–132; cf. 2 Cor. 4:17).²⁹ Here Lewis has clearly taken up the kind of Christological reading of

²⁸ Most likely drawing on medieval and Renaissance sources Lewis appears to have fused – or confused – Mercury with Apollo, the master of the Muses. This may bear some analogy with the treatment of Jupiter and Saturn in *The Last Battle*.

²⁹ The phrase “weight of glory” is not used explicitly by Lewis but “glory” and “weight” appear within a paragraph of each other here.

Pegasus found in the *Ovidius moralizatus* and other medieval works³⁰ and made it his very own.

We meet Fledge only once more in the *Chronicles*, at the very end of *The Last Battle*. Appropriately he is waiting for Digory and the other Kings and Queens of Narnia within the Western Garden itself – a place he was never allowed to enter in his lifetime. It is Jewel the Unicorn who first spies him, “a horse so mighty and noble that even a Unicorn might feel shy in its presence: a great winged horse” (Lewis 1997e, 167). As Chad Wriglesworth has convincingly argued, Jewel serves as an important Christological symbol in the *Chronicles* (Wriglesworth 2006).³¹ Yet Lewis’ choice of the Pegasus to eclipse even the Unicorn demonstrates the importance of Fledge as a mirror of Aslan himself. Let us remember that for Lewis Aslan is not only a symbol of Christ but rather Aslan *is* Christ as he would have become incarnate in a world of talking beasts. In the same way the Christiform Fledge represents that humility which opens the gates of heaven itself.

The very last chapter of *The Last Battle*, and the one in which Fledge makes his final appearance, is called “Farewell to Shadowlands”. The title is an appropriate one, for it reminds us again of the connection between Pegasus, Platonic Eros, and the planetary symbolism which frames the *Chronicles*. Having passed through the Stable Door – the door which represents death – the children with the grown-up Digory and Polly discover that the world they are in is like Narnia but strangely unlike it at the same time. Puzzling over this, Digory suddenly realizes that the Narnia they had known – just like the England they had known – was not the real Narnia but its “shadow or copy” (Lewis 1997e, 159). Having entered into Aslan’s country, into heaven itself, they have now, for the first time, encountered the real. On realizing this he exclaims: “It’s all in Plato” (160).

We have emerged with Pegasus into the realm of the divine Ideas, which for Lewis, good Christian Platonist as he was, means we have entered into the divine mind itself.³² In *The Magician’s Nephew* Aslan was described as being “a sea of tossing gold in which they [Digory and Polly] were floating” (Lewis 1997a, 165). Here in *The Last Battle* he is a “living cataract of power and beauty” (Lewis 1997e, 171) engulfing them and drawing them ever deeper into himself. Lewis is picking up the language of the mystics and the understanding of the

³⁰ For more on this see Steadman (1958) and Javitch (1978), who mention in this regard, among others, a French prose *Ovide Moralisé* of the fifteenth century.

³¹ This is well illustrated by Lewis’ poem “The Late Passenger” (Lewis 1964, 47–48) which tells of the unicorn being shut out of the Ark by Noah’s thoughtless sons. As Wriglesworth (2006) insightfully points out, the unicorn here is clearly understood as a type of Christ.

³² The understanding that the ideas could be located in the divine mind was adapted by Christians such as Augustine from Middle Platonism and was a commonplace of high medieval scholasticism. For discussion of Lewis as a Christian Platonist cf. Fisher (2010); Blanch (2006); and Tiffany (2014).

Trinity as an infinite sea of love ever flowing out into His creation and flowing back.³³ It is this which gives them wings, so that like Fledge they can soar over the landscape of glory, borne aloft by the tide of his love. We leave them there riding Aslan the divine Pegasus on a journey upwards and inwards that never ends.³⁴

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³³ For van Ruusbroec's famous account of the Trinity as a "flowing, ebbing sea", cf. van Nieuwenhove (2003).

³⁴ "Further Up and Further In" is the title of the penultimate chapter of *The Last Battle*.

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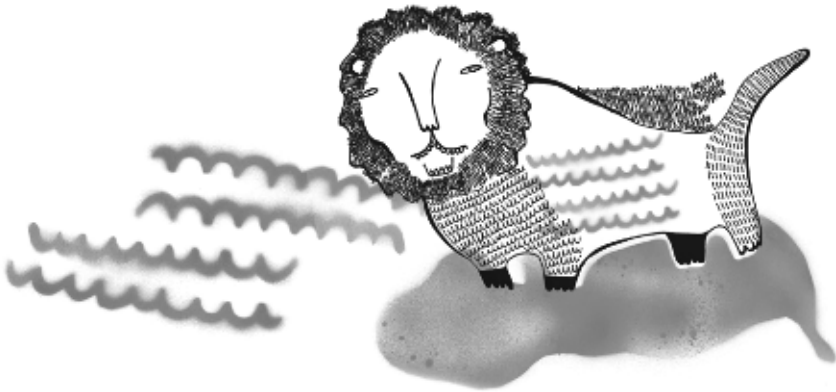
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PART 4

MYTHICAL CREATURES ACROSS TIME AND SPACE: NEGOTIATING THE BESTIARY



Maja Abgarowicz, *The Nemean Lion* (2012).
Illustration created at the Workshop of Prof. Zygmunt Januszewski,
Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw.

MARILYN E. BURTON

Man as Creature: Allusions to Classical Beasts in N. D. Wilson's *Ashtown Burials*

Christian fiction writer N. D. Wilson (born 1978) sets himself the task of showing children that they need not escape reality to find a magical world – magic is all around them (Wilson [n.d.]). In his fantasy series *Ashtown Burials* (*The Dragon's Tooth*, 2011; *The Drowned Vault*, 2012; *Empire of Bones*, 2013; *The Silent Bells*, forthcoming), characters of myth and legend from every culture and era populate our world – specifically, Wisconsin, America – making us reconsider the boundary lines we draw between story and history, fact and fable. In this context, Wilson explores the themes of the natural and unnatural, the human and the monstrous, ultimately showing us that it is no strange and terrifying mythical beast, but man in his wilful sinfulness, that is the true monster.

Ashtown's Beasts

For those unfamiliar with Wilson's writings, let us have a brief look at the background and premise of the *Ashtown Burials*. Fifteen hundred years before our present day, Brendan the Navigator, a sixth-century Irish saint, travelled the seas, according to the record of history landing on various Scottish isles, in Wales, and in Brittany, and according to legend undertaking a seven-year journey in search of Eden, during which time he discovered a variety of fantastical islands on the way to his ultimate destination. Later interpretation has suggested that he in fact reached the shores of America, and it is this interpretation that Wilson takes up, making the Navigator not only the first discoverer of America, but the founder of an order of explorers, the Order of Brendan, whose members "undertake to tread the world, to garden the wild, and to saddle the seas, as did my brother Brendan" (2013a, 57).

In Wilson's novels, Brendan, on his many voyages, came across many dangerous and evil beings, who for the protection of the world he imprisoned at the furthest reaches of the then-known world – that is, what today is Wisconsin (Wilson 2011). Vilest among these are the Powers – ancient gods and goddesses, necromancers and worse (Wilson 2014a, 101); others are transmortals – creatures once human, who have through various means acquired immortality; and

thus their imprisonment must be for all time. For this reason Ashtown, an estate of the Order of Brendan, was built – to stand guard over the Powers and transmortals imprisoned deep in its Burials. In the modern day, Cyrus and Antigone Smith, the young protagonists of the series, must protect both the Order of Brendan and the world from those who wish to open the Burials and let out their curses upon the Earth.¹

Wilson has repeatedly been censured for making his stories for children and young adults creepy and frightening – and indeed, he himself would be the first to say that his villains are scarier than many of those found in modern children’s literature (2016). Wilson’s contention in all his writings is that in order to see true heroism, courage, and triumph, there must be true evil to fight. There must be real danger, and there must be real fear (Wilson 2014b). So what is it about Wilson’s villains that makes our skin crawl? I contend that it is the fact that they are monsters – not merely terrifying creatures, but non-creatures – unnatural, God-defying hybrids. The *Oxford Handbook of Animals in Classical Thought and Life* describes *teras*, one of the key Greek terms for ‘monster’, as conveying “a sense of the portentous and the unlucky, qualities attached to unnatural beings who break nature’s laws” (Aston 2014, 373), such as hybrids, and it is this sense of the word ‘monster’ that I wish to take up in this chapter. Wilson makes extensive use of beasts and bestial imagery throughout the *Ashtown Burials* series, in connection to both his positive and his negative characters. Through examining his use of mythical and magical creatures, monstrous beasts and man-made hybrids, this paper will explore the relationship in Wilson’s writings between the unnatural – that is, the monstrous – and the true evil he wishes to evoke for his readers.

Four distinct uses of bestial imagery may be found in the *Ashtown* series. First, there are actual beasts, primarily the transmortalized creatures kept in Ashtown within the estate’s “cryptozoo”, such as Leon the turtle. Second, there are characters with animal elements, such as Radu Bey, a transmortal with the capacity to transform himself into a dragon, or Arachne, with her ability to control spiders. Third, there are human-animal hybrids created through the villain Phoenix’ eugenics experiments. Fourth, there are allusions to mythical beasts not correlated with an actual bestial characteristic, such as the name ‘Phoenix’. This paper will address each of these categories in sequence, showing how Wilson’s use of beasts in their various manifestations enriches the characterization of both positive and negative figures, highlighting the degree to which they are truly human or inhuman.

¹ Cf. Wilson (2013a, 403): “A millennium’s imprisoned curses will walk free”.

Cryptozoology

Within the boundaries of the Ashtown estate lies a zoo confining all sorts of weird and wonderful beasts. In the Crypto wing live “unusual, bizarre, especially deadly, and supranatural creatures” (Wilson 2013a, 387), most notably Leon, an alligator-eating turtle who, through centuries of drinking from the Fountain of Youth in the Florida Everglades, has grown to “the size of a van” (383) and gained transmortality.² Striped bears and flying *Jaculus Vipera* add to the mix. The cryptozoo is a terrifying place of extreme danger and constant emergency (Wilson 2013b, 60), out of control since experiments were performed on its inhabitants by the villain Phoenix, but it is not a place of evil. James Axelrotter, the young zookeeper who tends the animals as did generations of his family before him, never wants to be anywhere else (139), and is grouchy and unable to sleep at night when separated from his “transmortal beasties” (Wilson 2014a, 323) – for one boy at least, with whom the reader must sympathize if not precisely identify, these are not the stuff of nightmares, but merely unusual pets. Indeed, while they must be considered rather amoral than good, when they enter the fray between good and evil, it is on the side of good that they are made use of, with Leon acting as guard dog to defend Ashtown against Phoenix’ invasion (322–328, 366–368, 415). Outside the zoo, the same holds. Patriks, a rare, immortal variety of snake with the power to become invisible, are in the possession only of Cyrus, our protagonist and hero, and the Abbot of the Brendanite order of monks. Though quite deadly, they are so only to their owners’ enemies and will defend their masters when attacked (cf., e.g., 182–183, 281). Giant dragonflies are bred and used by the Order of Brendan as guards and watchmen, able to fly through storms to warn of the enemy’s approach (cf., e.g., Wilson 2013b, 116–118; 2014a, 274, 280, 282). Bull sharks are kept by Llewellyn Douglas, a member of the Order, the way most people keep dogs (Wilson 2013a, 352), and his favourite, Lilly, comes to the rescue of the protagonists on more than one occasion (cf., e.g., Wilson 2013a, 462; 2014a, 153–162).

Perhaps these are not the most obvious of animal companions to fight with the forces of good, but in an interview for *Dead Reckoning TV* Wilson gives us the following insight into his choice of creatures: “You have villains in most juvenile fiction – they’re with the spiders. They have spiders and bats. And the good guys, they have [...] golden retrievers. But the thing is [...] God made all of them, and man’s supposed to have authority over all of them, and you should have good guys with spiders, good guys with bats, *and*³ eagles and golden retrievers...” (Mattson and Friesen 2015). In other words, no matter how scary

² In Wilson’s world, transmortals are those who have previously been mortal (2013b, 57) but by one means or another have become undying, “nearly immortal” (2013a, 389); nonetheless, unlike true immortals, they can (with great difficulty) be killed.

³ Wilson’s emphasis (based on tone of voice in this recorded interview).

they may be to us, all God-made creatures are to be seen as good, and under the authority of good. This insight sheds light upon the first member of our next category, the transmortal Arachne.

Bestial Nature

Arachne, according to Wilson's retelling, was forced into her famous weaving contest against her will, the half-witch, half-demon Minerva wagering their lives against each other's and binding them together with curses (2013b, 251–252). When Minerva cursed Arachne's loom, ensuring her defeat, God, "who wove the world" (252), came to her aid, sending her spiders to help her weave extraordinary cloth.⁴ Now, unwillingly transmortalized by Minerva's life-bonding curses, she has the ability to control spiders, and an army of them constantly at her beck and call. Though many of the characters struggle to control their squeamishness when faced with Arachne's creatures (cf., e.g., 21, 72, 232), with the exception of course of James Axelrotter the zookeeper, who loves them (139), there is no question that, as Wilson said, the spiders are with the good guys, as Arachne uses them to heal wounds, weave protection, and defeat evil (cf., e.g., 232, 277–278, 428–434). Her control of them is not by magic, but by nature – or at least, as she herself smilingly says, "by second nature" (140).

Unlike in Ovid's version of the myth (*Ov. Met.* 6.129–145), Arachne is not a spider, nor does she have any spider-like characteristics, leaving aside her skill in weaving. While her transmortality is a curse, her spiders are a blessing. Nolan, the other transmortal who chooses to place himself on the side of good, is not so fortunate. Otherwise known as Nikales the thief, Nolan, as a boy, stole the fruit of life from Gilgamesh, and in eating it, became undying. Gilgamesh cursed him "for a serpent and a thief", dooming him to a life as an "undying serpent" (Wilson 2013a, 410). In this way Wilson reinterprets the Akkadian epic, in which an actual serpent steals the youth-restoring plant from a sleeping Gilgamesh (*Epic of Gilgamesh*, Tablet 11). Though unable to die, whenever injured, Nolan sheds his skin like a snake (cf., e.g., Wilson 2013a, 259–260; 2013b, 61, 250). This unwanted hybridity Nolan despises – unlike Arachne's spiders, which are natural beasts under her control, Nolan's snake-like characteristics are something sinister and unnatural, not a divine gift but a curse. Like Arachne, he also regards his transmortality as a curse; in their own words, "we two still feel like mortals, like death was stolen from us", and it is this that distinguishes them from the majority of the other transmortals, who "fought against their own mortality", and renders them positive characters (Wilson 2013b, 252–253).

This kind of hybridism – of merging of man and beast – is not unwelcome to Radu Bey, a "sorcerer of a rare and bestial breed" (95). A member of the *Ordo Draconis*, he, along with the other Draculs – Vlad the Second, Vlad the Third

⁴ Her cloth is described as having "supernatural properties" (Wilson 2013b, 144).

(also known as Vlad the Impaler or Dracula), and Vlad the Fourth – has bound a dragon soul⁵ – or gin – into his chest, giving him the power to transform into the dragon Azazel.⁶ Wilson describes the bonding as follows:

[Azazel] feeds on pain. His wings and his flesh were taken and destroyed by Solomon. Azazel needs a body. Radu needs power and undying life. Azazel is that life and, when fed, provides power beyond any man. The two became one. (2014a, 246–247)

It is important to note that dragons themselves are not necessarily sinister in Wilson's books – indeed, a golden six-winged dragon is the symbol of the Avengel, the Blood Avenger of the Order of Brendan (Wilson 2013b, 49).⁷ However, there is a strong association between them and the demonic: Azazel, according to Jewish tradition, was one of the leaders of the fallen angels, responsible for corrupting the Earth (cf., e.g., 1 Enoch 10:8); he is, moreover, associated with the Serpent itself, described as having seven heads and twelve wings, and the power to burn with his tongue (Apocalypse of Abraham 23:7, 31:5). In Wilson's books, the Dragon's Tooth itself, after which the first novel in the series is named, was torn from the jaws of a star dragon – Draco the Devourer – who had set his heart in hatred against the human race and God's creation (2013a, 275). That Radu Bey wished not only to associate himself with, but to bind himself to such a beast demonstrates the true monstrosity of his nature – indeed, when Cyrus expresses the wish that Radu Bey could be thrown among the terrifying beasts of the Crypto wing, Niffy the monk replies that Bey “is the greater monster. Any beast would tremble before the dragon Azazel” (Wilson 2014a, 317).⁸

⁵ Wilson 2013b, 145: “[...] blood sorcerers with dragon souls, they fed on their victims and mortal followers alike”.

⁶ The name Azazel, of course, comes from the Jewish tradition, in which it was the name of a fallen angel, though the details differ between texts. Wilson refers specifically to “a scroll [...] written by the great Bar Yochai” (2013, 245), clearly alluding to the Zohar, a thirteenth-century Jewish Kabbalistic text ascribed pseudepigraphically to the second-century rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. In this text, Azazel is described as the offspring of the Serpent Lilith and her rider, and thus serpentine himself. Cf., e.g., Biggs (2010, 158).

⁷ It is perhaps conceivable, given the associations elsewhere in the novels between dragons and fallen angels, that the six wings of this dragon are those of one of God's own seraphim. This would tie in well with the Avengel's role as a powerful, avenging servant of God.

⁸ By the monks of the Order of Brendan he is called a “bloody flesh-mixer” (175), suggesting his own self-mutilation in joining himself to the dragon is on a par with Phoenix' work on his hybrid men; see below.

The Reborn

Those we have discussed above gained their hybridity through curses or magic. But there is another form of hybridism in the books – that achieved through genetic manipulation. The chief villain of the series, who calls himself Phoenix, was born Edwin Laughlin, the fictional son of a very real American eugenicist, Harry Hamilton Laughlin (1880–1943) (Wilson 2013a, 438; cf. also Wilson 2011). Harry Laughlin was active in the first half of the twentieth century, and was a promoter and leader of compulsory sterilization of undesirables in the United States. Although originally welcomed in a number of states, his work was increasingly rejected in America once it was taken over by Nazi Germany. In the *Ashtown* series, Edwin Laughlin, an “evil man” like his father before him (Wilson 2013a, 399), carries on his father’s work, despite the fact that such experiments killed his mother (439) and tortured him (422, 440).⁹ In a quest to create superior beings – those he calls Reborn – he genetically manipulates his followers, giving them bestial features such as gills, enhanced lizard-like eyes (Wilson 2014a, 190), and a heightened sense of smell (Wilson 2013b, 424).

Of his first creations – whom he calls his Romulus and Remus – Phoenix says the following: “[...] they have a human mother, a wolf mother, a mother from among the great orange apes, and a mother devouring tuna in the sea” (Wilson 2013a, 329). To Lilly the shark, sensing one of them in the water, “parts of it smelled people, but more of it was like dog and monkey and [...] vile tiger shark. It had gills. She could feel the gills vibrating as it swam. It was not slapping through the water like people. It was slithering through it” (Wilson 2013a, 464). The Reborn’s behaviour is repeatedly described in bestial terms, mostly canine – they “crouch like wolves” (Wilson 2013b, 428), scent the air like dogs,¹⁰ hunt their prey as “green-gilled man-hounds” (Wilson 2014a, 189), and sit on their heels like apes (213). At least one has “goat-pupiled eyes”, chosen for their peripheral vision, but even in Phoenix’ own opinion “truly grotesque on a man” (204). The man-hybrids are monstrous and sinister, but ultimately little more than thugs – petty criminals who serve Phoenix’ will. It is Phoenix himself, the one who sought to “remake men according to his own demented imagination” (57), who is the true evil, and to him we now turn.

“Flesh-Mixing Devils”

Phoenix is called many things in the course of the novels – among others, a “flesh changer” (Wilson 2013b, 249), a “flesh-mixing devil” (Wilson 2014a, 171), a “man-devil” (Wilson 2013b, 33), and a “monster” (306). Continuing his

⁹ Apparently his father was trying to remove his and his mother’s gypsy blood, and never quite succeeded.

¹⁰ Wilson (2013b, 424): “[...] their nostrils flared, sniffing at battle air”.

father's work in eugenics, he creates his unnatural race of human-hybrids ultimately in pursuit of his own power and transmortality. To him, life is cheap, and especially the lives of his Reborn creations, whom he is willing to sacrifice in droves for the sake of power and scientific progress.¹¹ Once the process of transferring a soul to a new body is perfected, he applies it to himself, stealing the life and body of his young grand-nephew to regain his youth, until such time as he discards it to "absorb the life of a transmortal" and become transmortal himself (Wilson 2013b, 308). Like his Reborn, the remodelled Phoenix has gills and other bestial features, enhancing his physical abilities. But there is something *wrong* about him beyond his other hybrid creations, as is sensed by a pack of coyotes. To them,

he smelled like the other mans [*sic*] that now wandered their town [that is, the Reborn], but rot and death clouded around this [...] one [...]. He smelled like traps, like poisons in meats, like one whose eyes would soon bleed and whose snarlings would drip foam. He smelled like mate-killer, young-eater; he smelled like madness and rage. (Wilson 2014a, 204–205)

Phoenix is not merely the product of evil – a monstrous, man-made hybrid – but the source of that evil. He is the "flesh-mixing devil" who violates God's created order and sets himself up in opposition to the Most High. In the same interview quoted earlier, in which Wilson speaks of bats and spiders as belonging to the good guys, he speaks of bad guys – the villains – as

trying to manipulate and control and seize power and vandalise reality the way you see the villains in Scripture vandalising reality, damaging the image of God, abusing the image of God, trying to control the image of God or using it for false gain. (Mattson and Friesen 2015)

As a description of Phoenix' attitude and actions, this leaves little to be desired. In manipulating God's good creation, in making something unnatural out of the natural, in "vandalising reality", as Wilson puts it, Phoenix claims an authority to give and take life which is not his, but properly belongs only to God. And it is here that his self-chosen name becomes truly interesting.

The phoenix, in classical myth, is cyclically reborn from its own ashes, and though it is never stated explicitly in the *Ashtown Burials*, this would seem to be the association Edwin Laughlin is going for – he seeks immortality and rebirth of his own making. This would seem to be confirmed by both his use of the term

¹¹ Cf. Wilson (2014a, 201): "'Six of ours went down.' 'Six? Who cares about six? I can make six more of you between breakfast and brunch'"; Wilson (2013b, 308): "As for his children, they would be the first fathers of a new race. But at some point, years from now perhaps, he would still need many to die. There would be even greater crops to replace them".

Reborn for his created hybrid race, and by the name given to his bestial alter-ego, Mr. Ashes. But the phoenix has also been used, since the time of the Early Church, as a symbol of Christ and of resurrection (cf., e.g., Jeffrey 1992, 612). In appropriating such a symbol, Phoenix is parodying Christ. That this is so can be seen throughout the novels, as Phoenix claims for himself divine roles and titles – he calls himself “the New Man” (Wilson 2014a, 203) and “the Truth” (Wilson 2013b, 219), and speaks of his “triumphal entry” into the Ashtown estate (Wilson 2013a, 431). Of his Reborn he says, “I am their father, and in them I am well pleased” (329), parodying the voice of God at Christ’s baptism; in creating them, “more than ever [...] Phoenix was certain that he was doing God’s work. Or gods’ work. Or more likely, the work of a god” (Wilson 2014a, 338).

Yet Phoenix’ so-called resurrection, and the rebirth of his followers, is a twisted shadow of that accomplished by Christ and offered to his disciples. It is a resurrection not to eternal life but to transmortal life – not to sinless perfection, but to endless and downward-spiralling evil. Niffy the monk elucidates the dangers of transmortality in this way:

For us [mortals], the struggle against our inner darkness ends at a headstone and full stop. For you [transmortals], seeds of evil grow to weeds no matter how often you pluck them from the garden [...]. You fall and you rise and you fall again, but your inner war can never leave off, it can never stay won. Mortals weren’t made for it. We were made to run the race and hit the finish. Transmortals face pain with no end but the world’s end. And most can’t take it. They grow weary. They go mad. The flesh never dies, but the soul rots away inside. (Wilson 2014a, 103)

Arachne sees her transmortality as a curse for this very reason – in her words: “[...] men die to become their true selves. Wine and life cannot remain bottled forever. They sour” (Wilson 2013b, 352).

Phoenix is thus an anti-Christ type figure, more dangerous by far than any of the “certified monsters” (Wilson 2014a, 323) in the cryptozoo, more awful than his hybrid creations, and even more sinister than the demon-bound sorcerer Radu Bey – for he is both a monster and a creator of monsters, a violator of nature and of the image of God. For Wilson, this is the kind of monster we should fear.

Conclusion

Wilson’s wildly eclectic range of source material – from classical and ancient Near Eastern mythology to medieval legend and early modern history – offers endless possibilities for the kinds of creatures – or non-creatures – he could potentially introduce to his narrative. Given this, it is particularly striking that there are no purely bestial hybrids in his created world. Leon is massive and transmortal, but he is still fully turtle. The patriks have incredible intelligence and power but are one hundred percent snake. There are no chimaeras, no

hydras, no sphinxes in Wilson's universe. Rather, all of the hybrids – the "monsters" – are part human – or at least part transmortalized human.

This is surely intimately tied to Wilson's Christian conviction that creation, that is, nature, is inherently good, as God declares in the first chapter of Genesis. God's creatures, sharks, spiders, and snakes included, may be intimidating, but they are not sinister. Whatever is monstrous in the world must therefore be laid at humankind's door, as the direct result of sinful rebellion against God's created order. While eschewing tales of classical beasts, Wilson draws together and freely rewrites multiple myths depicting human arrogance and human failure – Gilgamesh's hunger for immortality, Arachne's mistreatment at the hands of the jealous Minerva, and the rise to power of the Dracul family, to name just three. None of the myths he selects is redemptive, but rather, Wilson's use of them builds a multi-faceted picture of humankind's pervasive hubris and folly.¹²

And yet, the *Ashtown Burials* books are driven by a powerful redemptive theme, one that often finds its expression not in classical or other myth but through the use of biblical story and imagery. We hear of David defeating Goliath (Wilson 2013b, 281, 305–306), and of "the one Mortal from whom even the Reaper fled in fear" (Wilson 2014a, 314) – that is, Jesus Christ, who conquered Death itself. But perhaps most interesting in light of this chapter is the powerful imagery of the Lamb, whose blood protects those it covers from merciless Justice and Wrath (386–391). This sacrificial blood is "the Fool's"¹³ symbol, the mark of the lamb who ravaged ancient lions [...]; it will not make you safe; it will make you dangerous – light to the darkness, life to the dead, love to the loveless, folly to the wise" (389). Whereas Phoenix and his kind seek power to which they have no right through twisting nature and bestializing themselves and others, the Lamb by its very innocence both possesses and grants a power to set all to rights, and ultimately to defeat the monstrosity of human sin.

¹² While there is no place to draw out the comparison here, it is intriguing to note that Wilson's use of myth is very different from that of C. S. Lewis, an author who influenced him greatly (see Wilson [n.d.]). Lewis had a very positive view of mythology, seeing all myth as containing some reflection of Truth. In his own words (Lewis 2004, 976–977), "[n]ow the story of Christ is simply a true myth: a myth working on us in the same way as the others, but with this tremendous difference that it really happened: and one must be content to accept it in the same way, remembering that it is God's myth where the others are men's myths: i.e. the pagan stories are God expressing Himself through the minds of poets, using such images as He found there, while Christianity is God expressing Himself through what we call 'real things'".

¹³ By "the Fool", Wilson means Christ. The allusion here is to 1 Corinthians 1:18–25.

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Human Categories in Oral Tradition in Cameroon

In an attempt to understand the nature of man and his environment, humanity's concern has been to probe the structural patterns and components that constitute the world and its creatures.¹ Among these, are the many intriguing mythological creatures and beasts from around the world, which from times immemorial have played, and continue to play, intriguing roles in their fascinating appeal to humanity. These creatures are always mythic figures or literary creations that generate popularity from oral performances and/or other forms of literary circulation. The existence or performance of stories told in each community in relation to these creatures often shapes the fantasy of the community as well as objectifies individual sensibilities therein. Though they constitute cultural foci, discussions on them are often exciting: sometimes over their verity and authenticity. This chapter is an attempt to trace the cultural and histo-geographical bearings of certain mythic creatures among the people of Ngemba, Batanga, and Beti-Fang of Cameroon. We examine the allegorical and transformational dimensions of these creatures to the individual and society at large. Inasmuch as the indigenes of these cultures tussle over who is who, and who owns what within the world annals of mythology, our discussion will point out that the issues of appropriation and abrogation depend on the power of the individual to pull the mythological cord towards the self. After all, cultural and environmental evidence is there to justify claims of ownership or the longing for ownership.

Written against the backdrop of postcolonial theory, myth and archetypal criticism, mythological criticism, and psychoanalytical criticism, this analysis hinges on the contention that, besides representational and some environmental factors which account for individual cultural identity, collective consciousness in mythologies of the world, and specifically in the domain related to creatures and beast literature, is ignited by the multiple psychic residues of similar types of experiences in different communities whose "results are inherited in the structure of the brain" (Bodkin 1934, 1). When these structures recur in different communities, the probability is often that "high cultures" appropriate the creature or beast as theirs. However, this process of appropriation does not deter "subaltern

¹ We wish to thank the anonymous reviewers for their input.

cultures” from defining themselves within the same framework, as has been the case with many cultural units, though at different degrees of intensity. The selected beasts and creatures used to demonstrate this parallel and differing structural pattern include: “Jengu (Mengu)”,² “Atutu”,³ and “Ngalveng”⁴ amongst the people of Batanga, Ngemba, and Beti-Fang in Cameroon respectively.

Geographical and Linguistic Background of Cameroon

Due to its geographical position in Africa and the variety of touristic resources, Cameroon is frequently characterized (the most popular travel websites included) as “Africa in miniature”. The country is endowed with a variety of physical and cultural resources. According to the online 20th edition of *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, “the number of individual languages listed for Cameroon is 284. Of these, 279 are living and 5 are extinct. Of the living languages, 275 are indigenous and 4 are non-indigenous. Further, 12 are institutional, 102 are developing, 88 are in trouble, and 21 are dying” (Simons and Fenning 2017). Among the four families of languages in Africa: Afro-Asiatic, Nilo-Saharan, Niger-Congo, and Khoisan, three are spoken in Cameroon, with the exception of the Khoisan family. Cameroon mythography, therefore, stems from the Afro-Asiatic, Nilo-Saharan, and Niger-Congo family groups. Clyde W. Ford observes that the Afro-Asiatic family of languages is influenced by Egyptian mythology, with major themes relating to the soul’s journey after death. The Nilo-Saharan language family is predominated with themes relating to accounts of creation. And finally, the Niger-Congo family of languages incorporates the Bantu and the non-Bantu mythologies, with a focus on rich epic collections, sophisticated cosmic order, divine oracles, and an elaborate pantheon of Gods and Goddesses (Ford 1999, xv; cf. also Lynch 2010, XIII–XV). Northern Cameroon belongs to the Afro-Asiatic and Nilo-Saharan mythical categories, and the southern part of Cameroon belongs to the Niger-Congo family groups. The myths discussed in this chapter originate from the Beti-Fang, the Ngemba, and the Batanga ethnic groups of Cameroon.

² Water nymph – the singular is Jengu and the plural is Mengu in the Batanga language. This creature is known in pidgin English as Mami water – the ‘sea mother’.

³ Atutu literally means ‘head head’. It is a human head which has the capacity to metamorphose into a complete human being to accomplish its mission.

⁴ Creatures that excrete fire.

Justification of Undertaking This Kind of Research

In spite of the lukewarm attitude of researchers towards myth-based exploration in Cameroon, myths remain, unquestionably, a carrier of people's identity, cosmic and developmental visions. Previous scholars in this domain in Cameroon have spent a great deal of time, energy, and resources examining the beauty of performers/performances, without giving attention to Cameroonian myths as an ideological construct (cf. Neba 2003; also Cheuzeu 1985; Ngwa 1995; Nchang 1999; Tala 1999; Alembong 2006; and Enongene 2011). Comparatively, research on myths and mythology in Cameroon, since independence, has been on a downward trend as evidenced by the absence of any major works in the domain. This stems partly from the country's linguistic and ethnic plurality (Simons and Fenning 2017) – a situation which prompts many researchers to focus on individual ethnic groups.

Further, the proliferation and strong evangelistic influence of Christian missionaries and classical mythology, competing with less enthusiastic heralds of Cameroonian mythology (cf. Ngijol 1985), also account for the limited research in this domain. Reiterating the role of myth and mythic figures as the basis for inspiration, Isidore Okpewho observes that “myth is that quality of fancy which informs the creative or configurative power of the human mind in varying degrees of intensity” (1983, 69). Therefore, failure to value such an asset or give it due attention, in any community, may create a cultural vacuum.

Methodological Note

The myths discussed here were narrated to us by informants whom we deemed to be well versed in the tradition of the communities in which these myths were collected. These informants were located in the afore-mentioned villages and different cultural groups in Yaoundé, a city of cosmopolitan nature. We then proceeded to conduct interviews concerning the myths. The informants' accounts of these myths were later compared with slightly different versions found in those students' end-of-course dissertations on myths (see References) in the Department of Literature and African Civilization in the University of Yaoundé 1. Graeco-Roman mythology comes into play in this work because Greek and Roman culture largely shaped Western civilization, and their influence (direct or indirect) on other world civilizations cannot be ignored. Since previous researchers have embraced the formalistic and sociological approaches as primary to the interpretation of Orature in Cameroon,⁵ there is a need for an approach or approaches which can help assert, connect, and show the interposing nature and the reception of myths. These approaches – chosen for the

⁵ Except Divine Che Neba who attempts a semiotic reading of myth in Ngemba, cf. Neba (2003).

present chapter – include: postcolonial criticism, psychoanalytic criticism, myth and archetypal criticism, and mythological criticism. They seem to throw light on the old puzzle of unity in diversity within the world mythologies.

The Question of Representation

Denotative Representation

Etymologically speaking, representation refers not only to the presentation drawn up by depicting an object “as it is” but also by “constructing it in a new form and/or environment” (Salazar 2008, 172). To represent means to bring to mind by description. The online *Dictionary.com* points out that it is “[...] the association or set of associations that a word usually elicit for most speakers of a language, as distinguished from those elicited for any individual speaker because of personal experience” (*s.v.* “denotation”). Ann Marie Baldonado observes that “[r]epresentations can be clear images, material reproductions, performances, and simulations. We understand them to be re-presenting a particular «real» thing” (1996). It is on this note that the people of Batanga of Cameroon view the Jengu, firstly, as an extraordinary beautiful black woman, with black hair, often adorned with the latest fashion in terms of clothing and bracelets. Secondly, she sometimes (especially when she is in the sea) appears as half human and half fish or half human and half snake. Otherwise known as the “Itongo” (Sea Queen), these water nymphs appear and disappear at both ends of the Atlantic Ocean, in rivers, and sometimes possess those who swim or riverine inhabitants (especially lascivious men). Besides living in their paradisaic kingdoms – under the water and in the world of spirits – on earth, after metamorphosing, these nymphs often reveal themselves to travellers to either enrich them spiritually and materially, caution them, or seduce them in order to impoverish or make them miserable. Lascivious men, who travel to most of these regions, are often disgraced by these mermaids after sexual acts. As members of the Ngele secret society testify, these water nymphs also empower and heal their worshippers. These worshippers are often arrayed in white, which has different allegorical representations.

The Ngele secret society among the Batangas commemorates the presence of these nymphs in a yearly festival christened “Mayi”. The function of this society is to take care of the cult of Mayi, a cult dedicated to the honour and worship of these nymphs in the Batanga Land. In these different places of worship, the Batanga people worship the water spirits, represented by the Jengu (Mengu), and only initiates are permitted to enter the holy grounds. The culminating point between worshippers and nymphs is a worship service in a boat that takes place in the ocean, precisely in what the people of Batanga call “Manga Mi dodo”, where rituals are performed to link the living and the spirits. These worship services congregate the Batanga people as a whole with their spirits and ancestors.

Prayers are equally offered, the future of the society foretold, and some of their requests are said to be immediately granted.

Like the *Mengu* among the Batanga people, the Graeco-Roman nymphs (Nereides, Potamides/Potameides) are equally depicted as beautiful young maidens and goddesses of the sea, who have in their care “the sea’s rich bounty”. Often, patrons of sailors, fishermen, and travellers, they came to the aid of these men in distress and punished defaulters. Sometimes they appeared on gems as mermaids, half maidens and half fish. The Nereids, fifty in number, for example, were worshipped in most parts of Greece, especially in sea-port towns (cf. Atsma 2000–2019, *s.v.* “Nereides”). Some of the Potamides were alleged to be prophetic (cf. Eschenburg 1837, 48), like their counterpart, the *Jengu*, among the Batangas of Cameroon. Potamides were aggressive towards wayward young men. Like other water nymphs, they were worshipped in sacred places, near sweet water rivers and streams, in gardens and the forest (Baine 2013, 281). These representations of the water nymphs in Cameroon and Graeco-Roman mythologies portray the role of nature in humankind’s imagination and man’s ability to appropriate what he felt belonged to him, to his utmost best.

The *Ngalveng* among the Beti-Fang possesses similar characteristics like the *Jengu*. For example, the physical representation of this beast is not very different from that of the Chimaera in Greek Mythology. *Ngalveng* is represented as a supernatural beast, a baby with fire in its anus. It is partly an animal and partly a baby. In Greek Mythology, Chimaera breathes fire rather than excreting it. The common denominator here is that both creatures are associated with the sending out of fire, be it through the mouth or anus.

The next beast, *Atutu*, is also very popular among the Ngemba people in the North West Region of Cameroon. *Atutu* literally means ‘head head’. This creature is believed to be in possession of only his head. Other members of his temporal body parts are borrowed from the world of humans, as the myths states. Therefore, he is a hybrid. Ngemba mythology holds that this beast borrows parts of the human body to come to the human world to win the love of a beautiful princess, who for many years rejected every man that asked for her hand. When *Atutu* succeeds, he stealthily hands over the borrowed parts and metamorphoses back to his normal form upon his return to his cave with the princess (Neba 2015). In their matrimonial home, the beast mistreats and starves the beautiful princess virtually to death on the pretext that she did not know his (*Atutu*) name.⁶ This multiform image (human and creature) portrayed by *Atutu* may be compared to the wild actions of the multifaceted Medusa (though female Gorgon), in Greek mythology.

⁶ For the text of one of the versions of this myths see Nkemele and Neba (2020, forthcoming).

Allegorical Representation

Though early civilizations around the world considered myths as purely sacred history, i.e. denotatively represented, developments within the domain extended the ambits by accepting them as allegorical and exemplary. Thus, their primordial concern shifted to explicating things which are not subject to pure scientific evidence and to showing how man, some of his activities, and his surrounding became what they are. It is within this similar premise that postcolonial critics do not limit their interpretation of things in just the way nature has offered them. Rather, they shift critical perspectives into allegorical dimensions. On this note, James O. Young explains that “R is a representation of an object O if and only if R is intended by a subject S to stand for O, and an audience A (where A is not identical to S) can recognize that R stands for O” (1999, 128). Young explains that sometimes R can only be a representation of an object O if the subject or the author wishes that the object O should be recognized by an audience as what he wants it to represent (*ibid.*). Thus, representations as such are visual images which are constructed and one can hardly tell if they are real. Drawing inspiration from Edward Said, it becomes more evident that representations can never be rational, because every individual does well to pull the cord towards his/her own direction (Said 1978). Thus, representation at this level centres on Stuart Hall’s view that it is a “medium or process through which meaning, associations, and values are socially constructed and reified by people in a shared culture [Hall 1997]. Representation involves understanding how systems of languages and production work together to produce and circulate meaning” (Salazar 2008, 172). Such constructions, from all indications, “need to be interrogated for their ideological content” (Baldonado 1996).

From all indications, the beasts and creatures described above are ideological constructs in the human psyche. They are not there simply as the beasts and creatures that are flaunted before us. Some of their attributes prefigure the minds and activities of people in the different spaces they occupy. If one revisits Joseph Campbell’s postulation wherein “myth is a collective dream, and dream is a personal myth” (1999, 16), then one may conclude that the mythic figures in both Cameroonian and Greek mythologies discussed above are vehicles of communication to the different institutions and personalities that live and rule in the different contexts; their different ambitions and solutions to problems. The world of “Gorgons” and “cynics” (i.e. hypocrites) could be represented by figures like Medusa and Atutu, Chimaera and Ngalveng; the world’s beauty, that is sometimes destructive, can be seen in the figures of the Nereids, Potamides, Mengu; and the world of “Januses”, the Roman god with two faces, includes figures like Atutu and Medusa.

Amid these generic allegorical representations, the individual societies have other ways of defining and interpreting their environment, which makes them unique. In terms of colour schema, red – among the Batanga people of Cameroon – symbolizes death, destruction, and power, while white represents death as well

as creation, femininity, spirituality, rebirth, water, and health. These colours are carried along by members of the Ngele cult in the Batanga land. All these allegorical representations bring into the limelight the people's cosmic vision and their expectations as they continuously live and attach themselves to water spirits and other ancestors. The same applies to the people of Ngemba, who see the duality of humanity through Atutu, and the Beti-Fangs, who see the forces of retributive justice through the actions and attributes of Ngalveng. This special allegorical dimension also abounds in other world mythologies, not only as pathways to meaning but as a means of defining and redefining different entities and individuals.

Appropriation and Abrogation

Despite the allegorical premise discussed above, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1990) makes a distinction between "representation" and "re-presentation." As Baldonado analyzes perfectly on the blog *Postcolonial Studies @ Emory*:

The former she [Spivak] defines as "stepping in someone's place ... to tread in someone's shoes" (108). Representation in this sense is "political representation" or a speaking for the needs and desires of somebody or something. *Darstellung* is representation as re-presentation, "placing there" (108). Representing is thus "proxy and portrait" (108) according to Spivak. The complicity between "speaking for" and "portraying" must be kept in mind (108). She also addresses the problem of "speaking in the name of": "It is not a solution, the idea of the disenfranchised speaking for themselves, or the radical critics speaking for them; this question of representation, self-representation, representing others, is a problem" (63). Spivak recommends "persistent critique" to guard against "constructing the Other simply as an object of knowledge, leaving out the real Others because of the ones who are getting access into public places due to these waves of benevolence and so on (63)." (Baldonado 1996)

Elleke Boehmer on a similar podium notes that cultural representations "were central first to the process of colonizing other lands, and then again to the process of obtaining independence from the colonizer. To assume control over a territory or a nation was not only to exert political or economic power, it was also to have an imaginative command. The belief here is that colonialists' and postcolonialists' literatures did not simply articulate colonial or nationalist preoccupations; they also contributed to the making of definition and clarification of those same preoccupations" (1995, 5). Boehmer's articulations can be given further meaning if we add that one way through which these colonized territories can define and clarify colonial or nationalistic preoccupations is by movements. When they move physically, ideologically, or spatio-temporally, they meet different experiences from which they can be able to draw other conclusions and redefine themselves. As Goldie Terry suggests:

[...] the shape of the signifying process as it applies to indigenous peoples is formed by a certain semiotic field, a field that provides the boundaries within which the images of the indigene function. The existence of this semiotic field constitutes an important aspect of the 'subjugated knowledges' to which Foucault refers in *Power and Knowledge* (1980: 81). The indigene is a semiotic pawn on a chess board under the control of the white sign maker. (1995, 232)

This suggests why in most postcolonial discourses, the indigenes want to know why things are the way they are.

The question of who is who is central among mytho-critics around the world as each culture wants to posit itself as interposing. Others, in the process of defining and redefining themselves, tend to question the authenticity, bearings, or claims of such interposing knowledge. Thus, the issue of appropriation, which has served as a base for such reactions and counter-reactions, has tended to redress certain classical frontiers that have long been difficult to provincialize. Each community, to borrow from Chinua Achebe, is bringing "[...] their gifts to the great festival of the world cultural harvest and mankind will be all the richer for the variety of distinctiveness of the offerings" (1995, 61). In this light, we need no longer only see European waters as the unique abode of water nymphs, but would also include waters of the other parts of the world, among them, the Batanga waters. However, even the Romans, who are believed to have "embraced" a lot from the Greeks, saw the necessity of appropriating and abrogating some of their myths and mythic figures as means of equally redefining themselves. That is why the Romans are often accused by passionate Greek scholars of truncating or introducing contradictory ideas in most myths of Greek descent. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin in a similar vein, using language as a microcosm of structures which empower the colonizer, intimate:

The crucial function of language as a medium of power demands that post-colonial writing defines itself by seizing the language of the centre and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place [...]. The first, the abrogation or denial of the privilege of 'English' involves a rejection of the metropolitan power over the means of communication. The second, the appropriation and reconstitution of the language of the centre, the process of capturing and remoulding the language to new usages, marks the separation from the site of colonial privilege. (1989, 37)

A typical example can be seen among worshippers of the Ngele cult in the Batanga region of Cameroon, wherein they have been able to construct cults and "rename" or name the wandering "nymphs" of Hesiod. Located in different cults around their land, members of the Ngele cult, worshippers of water spirits, are often arrayed in red and white, showing the sense of oneness and their strong attachment to their ancestral and spiritual powers. These people have not only

named their water nymphs but have gone further, like the Romans, to reserve secret cults and worship grounds for these nymphs in their society. As indicated at the denotative level of representation, their water nymphs, unlike others, are beautiful and black in complexion. This species may probably be a part of the about three thousand wandering nymphs claimed by Hesiod in Greek mythology, but as the Batanga mythology asserts, their abode and worship places are well known among the Batanga people of the coastal region of Cameroon. These are all means of accepting the world as one, yet singling out the self as a distinct entity. These parallels, which others have persistently appropriated, introduce the concept of universality and a unique creator at its origin. This creator and creation are not free in the hands of appropriators, as many different names have been given to the same creator and creations. The appropriative and abrogative nature of the messengers sent by the creator might have been the root cause of all the confusion in world mythology. Despite any controversy that might have cropped up between the different cultures of the world, the parallels in myths and mythic figures are evident. As this analysis has indicated, these similarities and differences need to be studied together and not in isolation.

Universal Categories or Archetypes

In literary criticism, the term “archetype” denotes “recurrent narrative designs, patterns of action, character types, themes, and images which are identifiable in a wide variety of works of literature as well as in myths, dreams, and social rituals” which are perceived “to be the result of elemental and universal patterns in the human psyche” (Abrams and Harpham 2009, 15). When these patterns are effectively raised or used in works of literature, they provoke a profound response in readers because they share archetypes expressed by the author. Borrowing from Juan-Eduardo Cirlot, “the ‘common rhythm’ of [Marius] Schneider belongs rather to the tendency to explain Man by reference to the world, while Jung’s ‘archetype’ tends to explain the world by reference to Man” (2002, XXXIV). This is logical since archetypes are epiphanies (in other words, visions, dreams, and myths) or simply put, images within the human spirit or what Cirlot names “the turbulent depths of the unconscious” (ibid.). According to Jung:

[...] the archetypes are the numinous structural elements of the psyche, and possess a certain autonomy and specific energy which enables them to attract, out of the unconscious mind those contents which are best suited for themselves [...]. It was manifestly not a question of inherited ideas, but of an inborn disposition to produce parallel images, or rather identical psychic structures common to all men [...]. They correspond to the concept of patterns of behaviour in biology. (Quotation after Cirlot 2002, xxxv)

Mythological criticism, a bedfellow to archetypal criticism, for its part, looks at the relationship literature has with human nature (cf. Guerin et al. 1992, 158). “The myth critic is concerned to seek out those mysterious elements that inform certain literary works”, the configurative mind, “and that elicit” or extract “dramatic and universal human reactions” by seeking “to discover how certain works of literature” imagine “a kind of reality to which the readers give a perennial or lasting response”. Generally, myth criticism works in line with the psychological approach because it deals “with the motives that underlie human behaviour” (147–148). The difference among them is in terms of degree and affinities. While “psychology is experimental and diagnostic [...], [m]ythology tends to be speculative and philosophic, as it has affinities with religion, anthropology, and cultural history” (ibid.). This theory (myth criticism) as Wilfred L. Guerin et al. hold, also sees a work “holistically, as the manifestation of vitalizing and interactive forces, arising from the depth of mankind’s psyche” (154). These schools of thought (myth and archetypal criticism and mythological criticism) help us to be able to scrutinize human forces and universal human reaction.

On this note, similar mythical beasts and creatures, their places of worship and abodes, their attributes and their relationship with humanity (in world mythology) go a long way to confirm the fact that there is a “supreme mythic faculty” (cf. Neba 2015) at the origin of things in the world. This faculty or being, with different appellations in different localities, has fashioned itself in such a way that the “inborn dispositions” in humanity produce parallel and identical psychic structures (cf. Cirlot 2002, xxxv), which are often appropriated by some groups or individuals as theirs, sometimes, to the detriment of others. For example, the Batanga people, the Greeks, and the Romans accommodate water nymphs, yet each group claims ownership. Furthermore, a similar beast like a Chimaera in Greek mythology is lodged amongst the Beti-Fang as Ngalveng, though one breathes fire and the other excretes it. The sum of all these identities tussling about is that the structural pattern remains the same. The recurring archetypes, which Alexander Eliot christens as “eightfold [for their number according to his categorization] treasures of the world” (1990, 60) and which are evident in the myths related to creatures and beasts in this discussion, only prefigure the mind-set of the unique creator at the origin of things. Differences in world myths, as Divine Che Neba adds, “stem from geographical factors, histories of migration, invention, claims of superiority, faculties of different messengers [and informants], impostors, issues of identities, which are common human phenomena that at times can be recognized even within households” (2015, 141). All these are evident in the different narrations related to the mythic beasts and creatures used in this work.

Since the role of myth, as earlier indicated, is to inform the “configurative powers of the human mind” at different degrees of intensity, to borrow from Okpewho (1983, 69), our various audiences faced with these cross-cultural parallel mythic figures combined with other mythological material can mobilize

their imagination and create for themselves a platform which would allow their integration into the global milieu.

Findings and Conclusion

The structural patterns identifiable in world mythology as shown in this chapter unveiled the unique nature of the mythic faculty at creation. The chapter's focus on similarities and differences amongst some selected beasts and creatures in classical Graeco-Roman and Cameroonian mythology only helps to corroborate Neba's view in "Traversing Cultures: Towards an Interposing World Myth" that humanity differs in "kind", not "degree", since the former could be refined (2015, 151). This refining process is the empowering gem that gives each community the force to resist the storm of assimilation, integration, and colonization.

On the basis of the above analysis, a number of observations can be made. First, the lessons drawn from the character traits of these beasts and creatures and their relationship with humanity constitute the moral and mythic charter on which the individual and society can stand. Second, the fact that all water bodies of the world move into an ocean as a culminating point proves that the water nymphs among the people of Batanga of Cameroon are possibly the same that are among the Greeks and the Romans, though each cultural unit appropriates and abrogates them as their own. Differences only occur when the process of appropriation and abrogation sets in, a process, as this chapter has attempted to illustrate, which helps to cultivate the nature of humanity to function in a defined way or adopt certain behavioural patterns within a given space and time. The third observation is that what one consumes, makes him/her. Thus, opening up more to indigenous mythology and creating room for other world mythology would certainly bridge the rift that separates people and cultures, and strengthen the individual at his threshold. Lastly, it should be remarked upon that the existence of these animals in any pantheon only helps in the translation of human categories such as universality, identity, and representation.

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JERZY AXER and JAN KIENIEWICZ

The *Wobo*'s Itinerary: There and Back Again

The present chapter is a report on the experience of our encounters with the mythical creature from East Africa known as the *wobo*. The first encounter took place in childhood, by means of a novel for young readers by Nobel Prize laureate Henryk Sienkiewicz. It was a formative text for many generations in Poland. One hundred years after the publication of the novel we were presented with an opportunity to search for the sources of this myth *in situ*. The evidence gathered has permitted to us to undertake an attempt at following along the way how the memory of a local mythical creature functions in the global culture of the twenty-first century.

From a Polish Formative Novel for Youngsters to East African Mythology

JERZY AXER

1.

In 1911 Polish Nobel Prize winner Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846–1917) published his only children's book, *W pustyni i w puszczy* [In Desert and Wilderness]. This is a story about two children – fourteen-year-old Polish boy Staś and eight-year-old English girl Nel (Nelly) – who are kidnapped from Faiyum in Egypt in 1885 by supporters of Mahdi, the leader of an anti-British revolt in Sudan, and taken deep into the “Dark Continent”, as the Victorians (the nineteenth-century Europeans) used to call Africa. They escape near Fashoda (now Kodok in South Sudan). Alone in the heart of “the desert and wilderness”, they make their way south-eastwards in an attempt to reach the Indian Ocean coast. They have many exciting adventures along the way and discover Lake Rudolf (in reality this was done by Sámuel Teleki in 1888; today the lake is known as Lake Turkana) on the border between Ethiopia, Sudan, and Kenya. Crossing a desert south-east of the lake, they meet a British expedition exploring the interior of today's Kenya and travel together to Mombasa where their fathers are waiting for them (cf. Fig. 1). The heroic Polish boy goes through an “initiation into manhood”, becoming a man aware of his responsibilities.

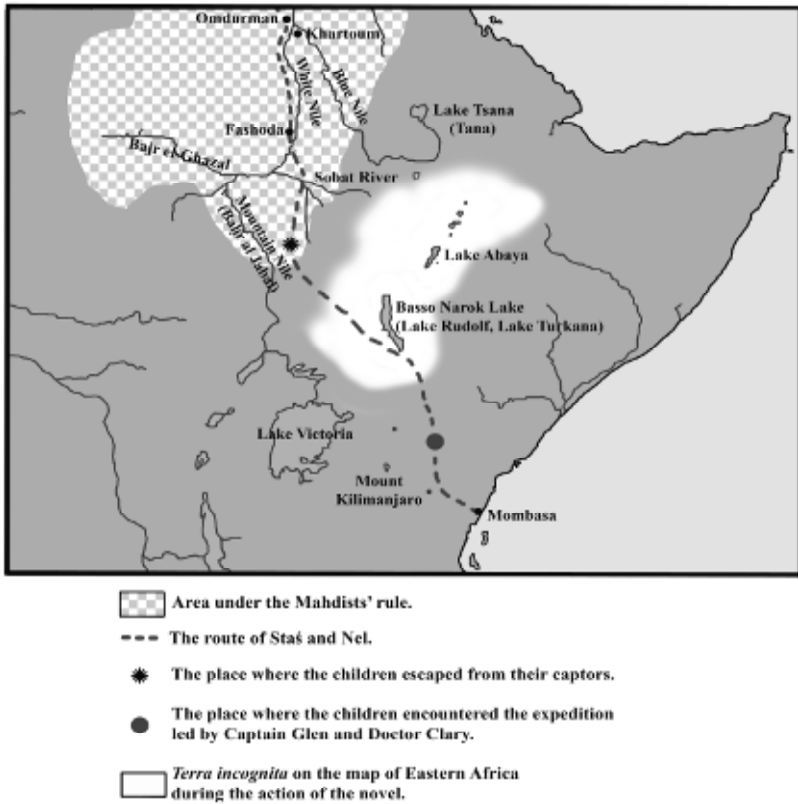


Fig. 1: Africa in the novel *In Desert and Wilderness* by Henryk Sienkiewicz, map by Robert Przybysz.

For eighty years this was a cult book for Polish children and is required reading at schools to this day. In our imagination, the people and animals from the novel are (or were until recently) part of the stereotype of Africa.

Sienkiewicz drew material for his book from specialist literature and travellers' reports, and also from the experience of his own brief expedition, when he went to Zanzibar and north-eastern Tanganyika (today Tanzania) in 1891. Identifying the sources of his knowledge on geography and nature is not much of a problem. With one exception.

That exception is the mysterious, demonic cat appearing in the book under the name "wobo", described by the author as part lion and part leopard (Sienkiewicz 1967, ch. 38). Things look simple at first glance. Sienkiewicz copied some information almost *verbatim* from the encyclopaedia *La nouvelle*

géographie universelle by Élisée Reclus, published in Paris in 1885. It includes the following passage:

Un autre fauve, encore plus redouté, est le wobo ou abasambo, que Lefebvre croyait être un loup et qui tiendrait du lion et du léopard: dans toutes les régions d'Éthiopie, les indigènes prétendent avoir aperçu sa robe jaune ou grisâtre rayée de stries noirâtres [...]. (Reclus 1885, vol. 2, 227)

Copying from the encyclopaedia, however, Sienkiewicz not only filled the imaginations of Polish children with a lasting image of this mythical African beast but also – whether he knew it or not – touched on an issue that is still under discussion today: the identity and place of the wobo in the mythology and culture of East African peoples. Reclus in his *Geography* collected the accounts of various travellers who, from the mid-nineteenth century, reported that there was a story going around in Abyssinia about a creature called the wobo. Among others, already in the 1840s a report from the Frenchman Théophile Lefebvre's travels in Abyssinia was published, *Voyage en Abyssinie, exécuté sous le commandement du capitaine Lefebvre pendant les années 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842, 1843*. It contained a list of fauna that included the wobo. Travelling in Ethiopia in the 1850s and 1860s, German-Austrian researcher Martin Theodor von Heuglin heard about a terrible cat called a “wobo” or “mendelit” (1857, 91; 1868, 236; also 1877, vol. II, 57). Finally, Marquis Orazio Antinori, an Italian who travelled across the same area in 1875–1877, also reported the existence of such a creature (1882, 48).

Some time after Reclus published his encyclopaedia, i.e. in the late nineteenth century, one could come across reports from Ethiopia concerning the wobo. I think one especially interesting testimony is that of Alexander Bulatovich, a Russian officer who accompanied the troops of Emperor of Abyssinia Menelik II in his campaigns in the empire's southwestern regions in 1896–1897.¹ This text, published in 1900, contains a direct reference to the wobo:

Есть особенная порода хищного животного, которого еще никто из европейцев не видал, но абиссинцы и галласы утверждают, что эта порода существует, и что эти звери самые ужасные. Называются они *вобо* или *асамбо*. (Bulatovich 1971, 62)

¹ There are two accounts: *Ot Entoto do reki Baro: Otchët o puteshestvii v iugo-zapadnuuu oblast' Efiopskoi imperii v 1896–97 gg.* (1897) and *S voiskami Menelika II: Dnevnik pokhoda iz Efiopii k ozeru Rudolfa* (1900), published together in Moscow as *S voiskami Menelika II* (1971). It is worth observing that the officer in question became later a monk and is known under his monastery name Antony.

There is also a peculiar species of predator that no European has ever seen, but Abyssinians and Galla claim it exists and that these animals are the most terrible of all beasts of prey: they are called *wobo* or *asambo*.²

Surprisingly, though, in a different context (1971, 116 and 256) Bulatovich uses the name “wobo”, or so it appears, to denote a man serving in a military position in Menelik II’s army. This meaning of “wobo” is even included in a new Amharic dictionary.

Then suddenly, at the very same time (circa 1900), the wobo completely disappeared from spies’ reports and travellers’ accounts. No one heard of it, no one saw it, it was not even clear what language the name might have come from.

2.

The wobo did not return until the mid-twentieth century, in a completely different kind of literature: cryptozoology. This is a field of quasi-scientific investigation and mass-cultural art concerned with the world of “unknown animals”, in which mysterious cats play a special role. Bernard Heuvelmans (1916–2001) is considered “the father of cryptozoology”. His book, *Sur la piste des bêtes ignorées*, published in 1955, was enthusiastically received all over the world.

Whoever was a child at that time will remember that after Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay conquered Mount Everest, the final white spot disappeared from the map of the world and mysterious places were replaced with mysterious beasts: the yeti challenged my generation’s imagination just as much as space travel. Thus, cryptozoology developed in parallel to science fiction.

In a book he finished writing in 1989 (although it was not published until 2007, a few years after his death), *Les félins encore inconnus d’Afrique*, Heuvelmans used the name “wobo” and devoted a brief paragraph to the relationship between the names “wobo”, “abu sotan”, and “abasambo”, claiming they were all sourced from informants in Ethiopia (2007, 17–18, cf. 46). The name “wobo” also appears in a work by Karl Shuker, Heuvelmans’ successor and a cryptozoology guru, who believes that observations regarding a lion-cum-cheetah-cum-leopard in East Africa are related to two hypothetical species (2007, 141–142). The first one was allegedly found on the Ugandan-Kenyan border and is called “damasija” (in Kikuyu); Shuker specifies the location of the other as the Ethiopian-Sudanese border and calls it “wobo” (believing the name to be Amharic) or “mendelit” (allegedly a Tigre word).

The wobo has had the right of citizenship in the world of cryptozoology ever since (cf. Eberhart 2002, 592). Paradoxically, Sienkiewicz’s novel became one of the academic sources involved in this whole affair. Michel Reynal announced on the Internet that he had made a “literary discovery” of the wobo in a novel by

² Working English translation. Also this mention matches the reports of Bulatovich’s predecessors and the definition of Reclus, see above, n. 1.

“famous Polish writer Henryk Sienkiewicz”. Therefore, the book became “a literary contribution to cryptozoology” (Reynal 2008).

3.

Within today's Tsavo National Park (east of Mount Kilimanjaro), people have nurtured the memory of the Ghost and the Darkness, two lions that killed over a hundred construction workers building a railway line from Mombasa to Uganda. These demonic lions “operated” in 1898; newspapers were full of reports about them. A legend began to emerge. A book by Colonel John H. Patterson, a British big-game hunter and sportsman who ultimately killed both lions, *The Man-Eaters of Tsavo and Other East African Adventures* was published in 1907. In fact, the American President Theodore Roosevelt's famous 1910 hunting expedition along the new railway line from Mombasa to Albertville was provoked by Patterson's report and was widely commented upon in the press at the time when Sienkiewicz started writing *In Desert and Wilderness*. The publicity the lion story gained during the time that *In Desert and Wilderness* was being written creates an interesting context for how the Abyssinian motif of the wobo appeared in the Kenyan setting of the novel.

Thus, in 2007, as I was standing with my wife Anna on the bridge across the Tsavo River near where those lions had killed the largest number of labourers (allegedly seventy-nine, and according to Kenyan patriots, they only chose Indians and left the natives alone), I thought I had solved the mystery of the wobo. I came to the conclusion that by exploiting the myth of the demonic feline from Ethiopia, Sienkiewicz had acted like a proper reporter: he referenced the legend of the man-eating lions on the Tsavo River, popularized in the media in 1907–1910. In killing the wobo, the heroic young boy from Sienkiewicz's novel performed the same deed that had made Colonel Patterson famous, more or less in the same place. And that was how the Abyssinian wobo gained citizenship of Kenya.³

4.

Meanwhile, a hundred years later, suddenly field researchers again encountered the wobo. In the same area where nineteenth-century travellers had most often heard stories about the wobo, the wobo itself appeared to these researchers in a completely new form.

From the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s the neo-Marxist scholar Donald L. Donham conducted research in an Ethiopia upended by the communist revolu-

³ Another branch of myths about mysterious beasts in Kenya involves stories about the Nandi Bear, an echo of the Nandi people's anti-British resistance in 1890–1906. However, neither these mythical creatures nor similar, more feline ones were ever called wobo. Even during the Mau-Mau Uprising (1953–1955) the insurgents referenced stories of demonic felines (“Leopard Man”).

tion, studying the Maale community. He published some fascinating analyses of changes in the system of power and rituals of this small tribe (today having approximately 95,000 members) living in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region north of Lake Turkana (Donham 1985). One of the special features of the structure of power that he described was the *ashtime* ritual, which he interpreted as evidence that the third gender functioned in this community (Donham 1985; cf. also Epprecht 2006). Anthropologists differ in their views on the function of people fulfilling the role of *ashtime* and their significance in the structure of power. The view that these were transgender people (individuals assigned male at birth) fulfilling the role of bisexual transvestites (Epprecht 2006) collides with the opinion that these were men under the special care of Maale kings, playing an important role in the nation's ritual life as the sexual partners of future kings, protecting them from being contaminated by intercourse with a woman.

The most important thing for our discussion, however, is that during his research Donham found an informant among the Maale who introduced himself as follows:

The Divinity created me wobo, crooked. If I had been a man, I could have taken a wife and begotten children. If I had been a woman, I could have married and borne children. But I am wobo; I can do neither. (Donham 1999, 106; cf. Murray 1998, 5–6)

Donham saw him as a transvestite and living testimony of *ashtime*. He translated the word “wobo” as “crooked” and decided that it described transvestism (“neither man nor woman”). In the context of gender identity and transgenderism issues, based on this sole testimony wobo became a *terminus technicus* in the discussion on the third gender (like *hijras* in India, cf. Reddy 2005). It is worth noting that Donham's informant said he was an exception at that moment, but there had been more like him at one time. Thus, the term “wobo” functions in the Maale language, but not as a borrowing from Amharic.⁴

5.

Like most people of my generation, I first met the wobo in early childhood:

Nel was standing under a *kusso* bush [...]. The pink blossoms she'd dropped out of fear lay at her feet, and twenty-something steps away a huge, tawny-grey beast was crawling towards her through the low grass [...]. With a single glance he [Stás

⁴ Azeb Amha from the African Studies Centre, Leiden University, whom I consulted, says that no such word exists in Amharic. This means that information identifying the word as being Amharic is based solely on the speculations of the nineteenth-century travellers.

– J. A.] saw a dark spot near the animal's ear, aimed the barrels of his shotgun at it in one light movement and fired.⁵

You do not ask what a wobo is in a situation like that. The picture painted by Sienkiewicz is enough: a terrifying beast endangering someone dear to you; a component of the personal and at the same time collective mythology of a Polish child. For some people, when time passes and their childhood becomes a *locus amoenus* – a paradise lost forever (and childhood books are the only effective way for such people to meet their own selves from the past) – only then might they think of trying to identify the species of that mysterious animal. For me, an additional incentive came from experiencing nature in Kenya, from my attempt repeated over the years to make my childhood dream of being in the middle of the world from the novel come true.

For fifteen years my wife and I have made regular trips to Kenya. Because we were both brought up on *In Desert and Wilderness*, it was completely natural that we asked everyone around us, very naively, if they had not seen a wobo. We asked hotel receptionists, Samburu and Maasai warriors serving as *askari* in nature reserves, naturalists in Mombasa and museum employees in Nairobi. It was all in vain, no one had heard anything. That is, until summer 2014 when we met a tracker, a safari guide whom we shall call Jacob, in Tsavo West. When we asked him if he had heard about the wobo, he answered, “No, but I have to ask my grandfather who knows many strange things”.

Jacob kept his promise, and his grandfather told him to ask us, “Why are they interested?”. A few months later we met with Jacob's Grandpa. The noble old man, or *mzee*, turned out to be an émigré from Ethiopia who (with a group of political refugees) had crossed the Kenyan border sometime around 1930 as a nine-year-old boy who was then a convent-school pupil. He had some information about the cult of the wobo, he just did not know if he could trust us enough to tell us more about it. That is how we began discovering the alternative history of the wobo.

6.

We planned our work together with Jan Kieniewicz.⁶ The scope and character of our search was largely determined by the fact that we were sure we had encountered a community of political refugees living among foreigners, strongly dispersed across the desert regions of the Ethiopian-Sudanese-Kenyan borderland and keeping their activities hidden, in constant fear of being exposed. This meant it was impossible to organize a professional team to study that community. If we did not want to destroy it, all we could do was register the stories that –

⁵ Working translation from Sienkiewicz (1967, ch. 39).

⁶ See the second part of the present chapter. Our thanks go to Maria Wiśniewska and Donald W. Harward for their support.

encouraged by our questions – its members would be willing to tell us through various middlemen who were not part of the “inner circle”. Therefore, we decided to obtain as much narrative information as possible, guaranteeing its authors complete anonymity and not trying to make direct contact with them. We accepted the hypothesis that we were studying a closed community cultivating a very old origin myth or one that was relatively recent and elaborated for our benefit.

Over the past four years we gathered successive versions, crumbs, and echoes of this myth, which came to us distorted by the mediation of multiple translations between tribal languages, Amharic, Swahili, and English. We did not try to inquire about logical and temporal connections. Our question as to what the wobo was (had been) led – quite unexpectedly for us – to the stories multiplying. They transformed before our very eyes, crystallizing and then dissolving again.

At first these were obvious traces of memories of persecution in Ethiopia, the destruction of convents and killing of monks; it was possible to associate them with events that followed the death of Menelik II, but the strongest association was with the consolidation of power by the future Emperor Haile Selassie in 1928–1930. The killing of itinerant reciters/storytellers might also have been an echo of the Italian occupation after 1935. Information about family relationships, contacts between the eldest members of the group also ran through the stories, and props appeared (a bangle with the image of a lion, icons, manuscripts written in Ge'ez). Soon, however, the stories ceased to be governed by historical time; all historical references from the period after the beginning of Menelik II's reign disappeared. On the other hand, there appeared multiple references to the ancient culture of the Nile Valley, figures reminiscent of those from the Faras frescos, Nubian gods, artefacts were replaced with references to the Ark of the Covenant, and the lion of Judah. With time, also the character of the stories changed: the narrative was no longer broken and incoherent, it became more complex, visions were painted more and more boldly. It seemed to us at first that the word wobo meant someone capable of turning into an animal, some kind of shaman warrior. Later wobo mainly started to signify the entire cult – an ancient cult brought from the depths of time and allegedly dying with the last generation of storytellers trained a hundred years earlier.

We were aware that such an unfiltered stream of narrative also carried with it material completely alien to African culture, processed patterns from nineteenth- and twentieth-century European culture: popular novels as well as films. The more they wanted to talk about themselves, the stronger must have been the temptation to reach for this kind of prosthesis. We were especially thinking of the books by Edgar Rice Burroughs and their screen versions (e.g., *Tarzan and the Jewels of Opar*, 1916) and by Arthur Conan Doyle (*The Lost World*, 1912). Such borrowings already appeared in the winter of 2014, and their number continued to grow.

Reality has exceeded our expectations. The latest package from January 2018 (over 80 pages of handwritten descriptions of meetings and records of conversations) shows an openly literary character. It is a collage making use of texts that were extremely popular over a hundred years ago (83 million copies, translations into 44 languages), namely the novels of H. Rider Haggard: *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and especially *She* (1886/1887) and *Ayesha, the Return of She* (1905); today they are easily accessible online.

7.

We have come full circle. We started from literary fiction created by a great Polish writer who aimed to provide the young generation of a nation without a state, i.e. Poland before 1918, with a model of courage and patriotism. As we sought a hundred years later to find traces of the story from Africa that had inspired Sienkiewicz when he was building his image of the demonic wobo, we caused quasi-mythical narratives to appear in response to our questions. They were ultimately articulated – in the belief that this form would be the easiest for us to accept – through another novel also written over a century ago: the story of a lost African civilization produced by a Victorian writer travelling across Africa and fascinated by its mythical past.

The story of the wobo thus returned to us as a narrative that our local informant Jacob (who had no formal education) embedded into a work that was fundamental for a separate type of fantasy novel: one describing lost worlds and peoples. Jacob introduced himself and his grandfather as characters into that story and gave the role of the high priestess of the cult of the wobo to the central character in Haggard's novels. Her name is *She Who Must Be Obeyed*. This character's impact on contemporary literature cannot be overestimated. Variations are found in Rudyard Kipling, in C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*, in J. R. R. Tolkien – and in both an evil and a good incarnation (Shelob and Galadriel). It can be found in the screenplay for *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014) and in *Game of Thrones* (2011–2019). It is also worth mentioning that Freud and Jung have analyzed the She character.

And that is how, for our benefit, today the descent of 1930s Ethiopian refugees has incidentally placed the myth of the wobo originating from “mysterious Africa” within the mass-cultural world of myths created by European narratives of the fantasy genre.

Nevertheless, perhaps under that layer of Victorian prose some incarnation of the wobo still lies concealed, someone excluded from the community by his (or her) own volition, having the power to transform into a warrior. Namely, in December 2017, when we asked a lovely young Maale woman accompanying Jacob during a meeting with us what the wobo was, she said it was also the name of “the one who steals goats from the rich at night to give them to the poor”. Surely this is some kind of incarnation of Sienkiewicz's wobo that attacked people and animals in villages in feline form, completely different from what Jacob has

presented to us so far. And what do we do with the information that in Maale ‘wóbbò’ translates as ‘lame’/‘handicapped’, while in the language of another Ethiopian people (Wolaytta) a similar word, ‘wóbbò’, has a similar meaning – ‘someone who cannot walk, is handicapped’?⁷ The Wolaytta people were being conquered by Menelik II when Bulatovich – who was with Menelik’s troops at the time – wrote about the wobo.⁸ Is there any connection between the word ‘wóbbò’ and a word describing a person with non-human abilities?

There is no doubt in my mind that there are many incarnations that the wobo could assume in the past, the present, and the future.

From East African Post-Colonial Tale, Back to a Formative Novel

JAN KIENIEWICZ

1.

During our quest for the wobo we came upon our own tracks, just as if we were Winnie-the-Pooh and Piglet (Milne 1926, ch. 3: “Pooh and Piglet Go Hunting and Nearly Catch a Woozle”). This was not, however, a surprise success, as from the outset we had been interested in our own identity. Being engaged in a search for the wobo’s identity, this quest ran parallel to the search for our own identity, as well. For the question elicited from a colonial spirit struck us with a reality that was essentially post-colonial. In my opinion, the result turned out to be worth all the efforts.

Who were we in this quest? Who are we today? This was an important experience for each of us. The first step was that of having become aware that our task was not only about tracking down the sources of certain themes in the novel by Sienkiewicz. The wobo, after all, was a part of our imagination.

In Desert and Wilderness truly shaped us. Being aware of this, we nonetheless did not fully grasp the consequences of the actions we were undertaking, nor did we grasp their impact on us. It seemed that we had found the mysterious wobo, and Jerzy Axer then told us in detail during the conference about all the ramifications of that. Yet in the meantime certain events took place, ones that induced us to delve much further. This happened as a consequence of finding in the course of our search items, stories, myths, and living people for whom wobo was not a character from the novel.

2.

In the beginning we had the impression that we had come across a shadow of tradition which carried us far, far back – perhaps even to the times of Ancient Egypt. Later, however, curiosity – we might say “desire” – compelled us on-

⁷ Information provided by Azeb Amha in a letter from March 26, 2018, cf. above, n. 4.

⁸ See above, n. 1.

ward, until we found ourselves again in the “heart of darkness”. As a result, our quest to establish the wobo’s identity, compelled us to look deep into the history of the entire region. Not only the area where Sienkiewicz had set his novel, but in Ethiopia as well. We seized on every trace with passionate readiness to press on ahead, heedless of the risk. Not always were we mindful that we were pursuing a path blazed by many generations of seekers deceived by their own imaginations. That we were conjuring up seemingly forgotten phantom dreams.

Today, taking a sober glance back at that experience, I discern not only the mechanism of succumbing to illusions, but also the proclivity I know well of shaping images of an alien world in accordance with deeply-rooted habits. I knew this – I had even written about it (Kieniewicz 1984) – but I tried not to permit scepticism. Being mindful of this, I nonetheless suppose that the tale of grandpa is as real as every other family tale. And this allows me to situate it in a long series of probable events.

Our searches for the wobo led us to the cult of Apedemak, the god of war and fertility in ancient Nubia. We encounter Apedemak in human form but with a lion’s head, and also as one having three heads and four arms (Nel 2001). We had not intended to launch such wide-ranging research. Moreover, a significant part of this history is well known; it has an enormous bibliography that covers the religious aspects of Ancient Egypt, Nubia, Meroe, Kush, along with the processes of the area’s Christianization and Islamization. The Christian temples in Faras, and also of Dongola, the Middle Age kingdoms of Nobatia and Makuria, are included in this history. In Naqa, in the ancient Meroe kingdom, the temple of Apedemak, the god with a lion’s head, stood beside the temple of Amun (Žabkar 1975). We are aware of the exquisiteness of these cultures, ones which ultimately fell under the blows of the Bedouins and Mamluks in historical times. The great heritage of Polish researchers on Nubia, not only our archaeologists, is worth mentioning in this context (Ochała 2014; Drzewiecki 2016).

For our search it is also important that a form of deity – one connected to fertility, water, and power – was connected to India. Among the matters that indicate this is his form when the god becomes a snake with a lion’s head. We know that an important trade and communication route leads from the Nile River to the Red Sea coast, and further across the Indian Ocean to India and Kashmir. I would argue that this is an important motif in our reconstruction – that is, the connection with the Indian Ocean (Haaland 2014). This snake-like and many-armed embodiment, which reminds us of the goddess Kali’s incarnations, seems to be even more crucial when we bear in mind that it is the snake that protects the object of the cult. It was an Indian tradition that made snakes protectors of treasure. Wobo, as a snake, also protects items which have a magical meaning.

Jerzy Axer has shown how a tale elicited by our quest transformed into a “literary” account intended to satisfy our curiosity. Does this mean the Ethiopian myth moulded from Kenyan clay is also an illusion? I would not say so. Rather,

I submit that it is not an illusion, for even if I cannot verify it, I do deem it a useful tool.

3.

And so we faced a fundamental challenge: how to continue our quest for the wobo and how to treat our involvement. My proposal leads towards writing another novel. That would have spelled a return to the starting point, to children's literature as a formative tool, as a key to reality. We would thereby avoid immersing ourselves in a hopeless attempt to master the knowledge of several disciplines and learning covering two millennia of peoples' fates on the vast sweep of northeast Africa. The proposal to follow Sienkiewicz's example does not mean capitulating; rather it is a proposal to shift the registers of cognition that suit the changes in our identity that had resulted from searching for the wobo. For no matter what we hold true today about the information conveyed to us, it is obvious to me that we encountered the trace of events with the power to give rise to myths. It turned out that under the influence of our venture, a narrative appeared – that the tale became the consequence of an awakening. A former colonial wrote us back, as if we were representatives of the colonizers, which only confirms the conviction that none of us is without guilt.⁹ Our posture vis-à-vis that “back package”, a sort of return message, may of course vary, but in keeping with the rules of the game it should be a novel. The construction of a novel's narrative becomes an answer to a colonial situation, and this is not an entrance into a postcolonial arrangement, as is the case with the attempt at scholarly deconstruction.

This should be a traditional tale, although it of course can have a modern form. It should take up the same formative motif, i.e. the universal problem of forming character. However, differently than with Sienkiewicz, the answer should not focus on the white man. Differently than with the *oeuvre* of H. Rider Haggard and Pierre Benoit,¹⁰ nor at the centre of our attention do we find the revenge of a coloured woman on a man (cf. Dawidowicz 2009). The postcolonial context of our experience is expressed in the choice of the same literary convention – namely, the adventure tale. The attempt to meet that challenge – i.e. the confrontation of expectations with the character of the “back package” – will rest with the manner of carrying this out.

4.

The novel *Amanda: The Girl Who Needs to Be Listened To* would have a simple plot. A young girl, passionate about photography, dreaming of a career as an archaeologist, during her internship in the field at Lake Turkana, decides to par-

⁹ The idea comes from Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2002); cf. Łukaszyk and Skórczewski (2016, 87–103 and 119–145).

¹⁰ Pierre Benoit, a French author of similar literature a generation younger. His *Atlantide* (1919) was at its time as popular as Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885).

ticipate in an expedition seeking a mysterious chest that had belonged to her family for generations. Her father worked in the Marakwet Heritage Project and had never mentioned anything about their great, royal past. The initiator of her endeavour was the centenarian great-grandmother of Amanda, who saw in the young girl a personality similar to her own, and who wished to pass on the family tradition and the mysteries related to it. On the way north to the cave that safeguarded the treasure left during the family's flight from Ethiopia eighty years earlier, the heroine not only matures into her role, but conducts a retrospection into the tradition passed on to her. She wishes to understand what it means that she is to become *Wobo*, the one to whom people must be obedient.

The road down from Lake Turkana led them through Gamu-Gofa, Kaffa, Illubabor, Weloga, and Gojjam to the upper stretch of the Blue Nile – to Gondor. The old wooden chest, protecting the ritual objects hidden in some cave from unauthorized eyes, remains under the protection of a snake. The snake knows who can open the chest. Amanda experiences adventures, overcomes difficulties and dangers, and eventually comes back with the treasure, but remains uncertain of her fate. Insofar as the way *to* was an adventure, the way back became a drama for the heroine. She encountered in it a young person whom she did not love, although that person had saved her. She also met an old person whom she trusted, although he betrayed her. She then experiences the death of her great-grandmother and finds out things about herself that she had never anticipated. There will be no happy ending.

I intentionally give a title that paraphrases the term 'She' from the title of Haggard's tale and the story of Jacob. The response to the "back package" is not to be a caricature, an inversion of postcolonial paradigms. It is also important for me that, in meeting a postcolonial response halfway, all the parties involved find a common ground. What I intend is a transgression of the realm within which not only tradition, but also postcolonial convention encloses the heroine.

The fable is but the tale's skeleton. Fleshing it out with some story about cultural phenomena, about African syncretisms filtered through European science is nothing difficult. The challenge is to construct a believable figure and premise that gets to today's recipient. Who will write this tale, and for whom? One would like to imagine that it will not be either colonial or postcolonial, and that it will all the while retain the magic with which the Polish Nobel Prize winner imbued his own tale.

5.

The things we struggle to find out about concern the process of passing on tradition, its message, and the relations between objects, texts, and words. The things we are supposed to have discovered so far indicate the gradual transformation of a religious message into a kind of magic. My understanding stands as follows: in the lands of Nubia a syncretism had taken place, one connecting the old lion-god with Christianity. Before the end of the fourteenth century, the descendants of Apedemak's worshippers had to abandon their Nubian homelands and together

with the remaining Christians seek shelter in the lands of Ethiopia. No doubt it was there, again in consequence of internal tensions and external dangers, that the cult eventually took the form of a convent or a secret sect centred around a figure capable of magical transformation. This group gained influence, significance, and wealth. Here I leave out several centuries of Ethiopian history. What is probable and important is that Haile Selassie's ascension to power forced the handful of this sect's adherents to flee. Outside their country and in isolation from magical artefacts, these people lost their sense of purpose. They believe they preserved their powers, however, they did not have an environment where their powers could operate. That is how things might have been, and in such soil a mythology of refugees fleeing to Kenya might have taken shape, of people powerless vis-à-vis the implacable processes of assimilation. The appearance in Jacob's accounts of elements borrowed from European adventure tales did not change my conviction that that is how things might have been. I make this the tale's truth, and in this truth I build a space for encounter.

6.

In approaching a conclusion, my view is that in the process whereby this supposed or invented cult transformed into a magical practice, the way it connected the concept of a god to an actual, existing animal changed. Typically, it was a genuinely existing animal that provided the form for the mythical figure of a god. Here it was different. Nor does the matter end here. Indeed, it was magic, regardless of whether it was conducted by a shaman or any other person crucial for the community's bond, that led to the emergence of the wobo. The wobo (man or woman) donned an arbitrary form, that of an animal or a chimaera, and in this way manifested its bond with the god – or perhaps his or her own divinity. For it is not certain just what this ancient Nubian cult transformed into over those two thousand years, nor how it adapted the Christian imaginarium to its own needs. Man or woman (bearing in mind the matrilineal train of thought), he or she already was or was only becoming the wobo, a figure beyond identification, whether in the human or animal world.

That was the reason for why the wobo was heard far and wide, but no one saw him (or her). Those who searched for it connected the wobo to various animals, ones they would even kill, make trophies out of them, or the opposite – they would attribute to them the role of fighters for freedom. This once popular story, perhaps sowed purposely, for a long time now has been treated as an oddity. In my opinion the Wobo, intentionally written with a capital letter, was not the incarnation of a human in an existing animal. It was also not a real human, not a man, nor a woman, but a *sui generis* avatar, a many-character form expressing the power of the divine. The power necessary to sustain the community which, however small or limited, struggled, sometimes successfully, to assure itself influence or even domination over society.

In my opinion, the transformation process of the cult, the shaping of the tradition that assured the distinctiveness of the newcomers' group, is what had the

crucial meaning in all of this. In this process, tradition converted into magic that was to sustain the integrity of the group without exposing it to conflict with the environment. It became a tool protecting the community from escalating external pressures. The secret had to be entrusted to people from beyond the sphere of the officially accepted religion. Those introduced to the secret, the guardians of tradition, obtained special powers. As I understand the things we succeeded in finding, one special power concerned taking on the form of animals. But as I said: the Wobo is the He or She having this power at their disposal. There is no wobo animal, there are only imagined animals more or less alike this incarnation. I wish to say that the statement “I am wobo” or “She is wobo” means the ability of adopting a form which is outstanding in its singularity, and therefore neither human nor animal.

7.

No living person has seen a wobo, but nonetheless we managed to discover an animal fitting people's perceptions of how the wobo looked in the times of Sienkiewicz. Yet we did not content ourselves here. The reconstruction of the search for the animal was only the beginning of our path. We then sent Amanda, the novel's character, out on a further expedition, now endowed with our knowledge and hunches, but autonomous in her choices.

To say anything about this, we have to find ourselves inside. In order to understand, I should become a Wobo. That is of course impossible. That is why I propose a novel narrative. Delving into the identity of the Kenyan girl may well also be a fool's errand, but it fits within rationality.

This is why I said that seeking the Wobo's identity causes us to reflect on the identity of the prospectors. And I point out a solution which shows us a telltale return to the starting point. The opportunity for this is created by children's literature, its magic, fantasy, and imagination. I will not follow the wobo's trail up the Blue Nile, to Lake Tana, in order to delve into the world of medieval Ethiopia, its temples, chronicles, into the confusion of caves and mysteries. But the novel? This is the appropriate tool for such a crazy endeavour. Hence, I think that by offering a hypothesis about the identity of Wobo as a person who becomes someone both not human and not animal – so who, exactly? – I can also point out the new identity of its prospectors, an identity more childish, definitely quarrelsome, one open to the magic of the unknown and to the marvellous.

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MAŁGORZATA BOROWSKA

The Awakening of the κνώδαλα, or Inside a Great Fish Belly

“Starving in the belly of a whale!”
Thomas Alan Waits¹

Κἄν ἔν γάρ δῆ τοῦτο ἀληθεύσω λέγων ὅτι ψεύδομαι.
Lucian of Samosata, *Vera historia* 1.1²

“Omnis homo mendax.”
Philippe d’Alcriste³

I never really liked Pinocchio. It was one of the first longer prose stories that my mother read to me, so I must have been about five by then. The thing that bothered me was what happened to Pinocchio’s nose, because I myself had an inclination, of which my parents disapproved, for what you might call confabulation, and I was not quite sure whether the elongation of this very visible part of the body only applied to lying wooden puppets or not. On the other hand, one of Pinocchio’s adventures made a huge impression on me at the time and, as often happens with childhood reading, though I completely forgot where I knew it from, it certainly contributed to my fascination with the sea and everything associated with it.

In the story Pinocchio throws himself into the sea to save Geppetto who set off to search for Pinocchio in a frail little boat and disappeared in the depths during a storm. Pinocchio meets “un grosso pesce” (a big fish). The big fish turns out to be a good-natured *Dolfino*, but it warns Pinocchio about... a big fish, *il Terribile Pescecane*, which in different translations is called a whale or a shark and “is larger than a five-story building and [...] has a mouth so big and so large,

¹ From the song by Tom Waits and Kathleen Waits-Brennan “Starving in the Belly of a Whale”; see Waits (2009).

² “[F]or though I tell the truth in nothing else, I shall at least be truthful in saying that I am a liar”, translation by Austin Morris Harmon in Lucian (1913, 253).

³ “Every man is a liar”; cf. also Ps 115:2 and Kirby (2014, 167).

that a whole train and engine could easily get into it”, according to a translation of 1926 by Carol Della Chiesa (Collodi 1944, 113).

Pinocchio ends up in the beast’s belly, where a wind blows – the monster suffers from asthma – and darkness reigns. There he meets the Tunny, an amateur philosopher reconciled to his fate and waiting to be digested, from which he learns that the beast’s “body, not counting the tail, is almost a mile long” (196). Pinocchio notices a faint light and walks towards it until he finds Geppetto sitting by candlelight at a little table set for dinner, eating live fish – I hope most children fail to notice this rather gruesome detail! It turns out that Geppetto has survived in the Big Fish’s belly after finding a load of preserved foods and other items on a merchant ship that the Fish had swallowed whole, probably causing it to suffer from chronic indigestion – though the writer does not mention it – on top of the asthma, considering that despite the Tunny’s fears, Geppetto had been living inside the Fish in good health for two years now!

The writer makes the escape easy for his protagonists: his Big Fish has “heart trouble” due to old age and sleeps with its mouth open, so Pinocchio and Geppetto climb into its throat, run along its tongue which is so wide it “looked like a country road”, cross three rows of teeth and jump into the sea, ultimately reaching the shore thanks to help from the Tunny. “The sea was like oil, the moon shone in all splendor, and the Shark continued to sleep so soundly that not even a cannon shot would have awakened him” (204–205).

This description of a night at sea and the sleeping “big fish” reminds me of an extraordinarily beautiful fragment of a now lost, mysterious work by Alcman, the poet from the seventh century BC:

Εὔδουσι δ' ὀρέων κορυφαί τε καὶ φάραγγες
 πρώνες τε καὶ χαράδραι
 ὕλα θ' ἔρπετά θ' ὅσσα τρέφει μέλαινα γαῖα
 θῆρες θ' ὀρεσκώιοι καὶ γένος μελισσῶν
 καὶ κνώδαλ' ἐν βένθεσσι πορφυρέας ἄλός
 εὔδουσι δ' οἰωνῶν φῦλα τανυπτερύγων. (frg. 89, PMGF 1991)

The mountain-tops are asleep, and the mountain-gorges,
 Ravine and promontory:
 Green leaves, every kind of creeping things
 On the breast of the dark earth, sleep:
 Creatures wild in the forest, wandering bees,
 Great sea-monsters under the purple sea's
 Dark bosom, birds of the air with all their wings
 Folded, all sleep.⁴

⁴ Translated by Walter Headlam (1907, 3).

This fragment describes nature asleep – both inanimate (mountains, forests, gorges) and animate (animals of the land, sea, and air) nature – and it has survived solely because a later grammarian (Apollonius the Sophist, ed. Bekker, 1833, 11) found it to contain a rare term for sea monsters – κνώδαλον (καὶ κνώδαλ’ ἐν βένθεσσι πορφυρέας ἀλός, Anacreon 1988, 454–455).

The kind Dolphin and the grateful Tunny prove that the sea (the events unfold on the Italian coast of the Mediterranean) is also home to gentle κνώδαλα, but the Big Fish is unquestionably much more fascinating, though what will arouse children’s curiosity is different from what adults will ask about.

Adults – as we learn by browsing different websites – will first of all check the probability of such an occurrence, where the impulse to investigate comes not from the scene from the children’s book but from the biblical story of Jonah (the Hebrew name meaning ‘dove’), who by the will of God spent three days and three nights in the belly of a “big fish” (Jonah 1:1–2:10, The Bible Gateway). By the way, it is worth noting that Pinocchio is told of Geppetto’s fate and then transported to the shore a thousand miles away by... a Dove!

Inquiries go in several directions. Could a marine animal, and what kind, swallow a human alive? Could such a person survive in the animal’s throat or stomach and for how long? Should the dramatic question that appears on various websites (with such headlines as “Could a Whale Accidentally Swallow You?!”, cf., e.g., Eveleth 2013; Turner [2014]; Ashish [2016]) actually cause us concern?

The search itself could form the plot of an interesting book. A footnote in the Polish Millennium Bible refers to “early commentators” who considered Jonah’s “big fish”, called κῆτος μέγα, a ‘big whale’, in the Septuagint, to have been a species of shark, *Squalus carcharias*.

Jonah was in the belly of his big fish for three days, Geppetto – for two years! Let’s add the testimony of another man who loved adventures: Baron Munchausen himself! This unparalleled adventurer, when he was bathing in the sea not far from Marseilles, was attacked and swallowed by a “big fish”. Like Pinocchio, the Baron found himself in darkness, also felt a pleasant warmth and, since he seldom left things to run their course, he started irritating the fish’s throat by frolicking about, jumping up and down, and wildly dancing a Scottish jig, as a result of which the fish’s convulsions attracted the attention of some fishermen, who caught it, slit it and were amazed to see a living man emerge from its stomach. He estimated his time spent inside the fish at more or less four hours and a half! This cautious “more or less” naturally makes the whole story more believable.

The inimitable Baron had one more opportunity to see the inside of a sea monster so big that he “could not see the end of him, even with a telescope” (Raspe 2005, 211). Swallowed with his ship and its crew, in the fifteen days he spent in the beast’s belly he met more than 10,000 shipwrecked people from all parts of the world, most of whom had been there for many years.

The only “historical” case of a human being swallowed is the story of British sailor James Bartley, who allegedly met with such misadventure in 1891 during a whale hunt, when he was swallowed by a sperm whale that was hunted down the next day. After about fifteen hours in the whale’s stomach, Bartley was removed from it almost safe and sound, as the stomach acids had caused him to go blind and his hair to turn white (Ziolkowski 2007, 83). Unfortunately the sailor’s mishap has not found any reliable corroboration in any documents, so it must be viewed as a “tall tale”.

So much for adults. A child, I presume, above all will be curious about the insides. What can you find in a whale’s belly? The question can be phrased differently: How capacious is the belly of a “great fish”? As we remember, the body of Pinocchio’s Big Fish “not counting the tail” was “almost a mile long” (Collodi 1944, 196). In the belly, Geppetto found everything he needed: food supplies, including sugar, coffee and wine, and fish that he fried over wood from wrecked ships that the fish had swallowed, until he ran out of matches (ibid.).

We know nothing about the capacity of Jonah’s “big fish”, since the prophet devoted all of his time inside it to prayer and passively put himself at God’s mercy (Jonah 2:1). If we are to believe in Munchausen’s account, the stomach of the fish that swallowed him on his third voyage could easily accommodate a dozen men. The whale in which he found himself when he went through Aetna to the other side of the world was much bigger. With each gulp the monster swallowed so much water that it would fill Lake Geneva (Raspe 2005, 211).

A certain Philippe d’Alcricpe, a Cistercian monk also known as le Picard, wrote a collection of almost a hundred tales called *La Nouvelle Fabrique des excellents traicts de verité*, published in 1579, in which he included a rhyming description of a great whale (“une merveilleuse balaine”) and meticulously listed the contents of its belly:

[...] une merveilleuse balaine
 Cornue comme une beste à laine:
 Cela est seur et approuvé;
 En laquelle on a trouvé,
 Sans les chairs sallées et biscuyt,
 Cinq cens soixante-dix-huict
 Brigantines, dedans son corps,
 Sans les sengles, brides et mors,
 Et qui plus est vingt-huict hunes,
 Dix-huict mastz bien assortez
 Avoit le long de ses costez [...]. (D’Alcricpe 1982, 214)

An adult will be sure to inform us that today, besides devoured marine animals and the plastic which is ubiquitous in the oceans, the stomachs of sharks and predatory whales are found to contain things like golf balls, surgical gloves,

items of clothing, but so far no one has caught any “big fish” whose stomach could hold even a standard whaling dory!

But even an adult has to admit that “big fish” swim in the sea of myths and tales, in the extensive marine bestiary, as creations of the imaginations of innumerable generations of seamen fearing the depths while at the same time finding great enjoyment in scaring their listeners with stories of blood-curdling encounters with monsters in distant waters.

The Greeks – the people of the sea, who colonized the Mediterranean coast and extended the boundaries of their *oikoumene* traversing the sea – were afraid of the sea and mistrusted it. No wonder that their lively imagination filled the bottomless depths with dangerous monsters, the offspring of the first gods, “the Old Men of the Sea”, and the children of Poseidon, who inherited their father’s unpredictable and short-tempered nature.

In Homer’s sea, adventurers were at risk from voracious beasts, above all, Charybdis, great-grandmother of the Big Fish, swallowing whole ships. William Hansen, in the chapter “Man Swallowed by Fish: Lucian” in his book *Ariadne’s Thread: A Guide to International Tales in Classical Literature*, diligently lists all instances in which ancient mythographers mention events similar to Pinocchio’s adventure. In some – less popular – versions of the myth, Perseus let himself be swallowed by the sea monster to which Andromeda was to be sacrificed, and he killed it from inside. In the same way, Heracles allegedly slit open the sea monster sent by Poseidon against Laomedon, king of Troy (Hansen 2002, 261–264).

But these mythical Greek monsters roam what are already literary waters. The original tales must have been produced within an oral tradition and appeared in different cultures of peoples linked to the sea. It seems a mistake that the “man swallowed by a great fish” is counted among “tall tales” (1889G) in the Aarne–Thompson–Uther (ATU) catalogue and not among tales of magic. ATU records different variations of this motif in the languages of Northern European peoples while completely ignoring its presence in *The Thousand and One Nights*.

Meanwhile, Sinbad the Sailor encountered a “big fish” twice.⁵ In the first of his seven wonderful adventures, he lands on an island looking like the gardens of Paradise. It turns out to be a giant whale that has taken such a long nap in the middle of the sea that the sand has covered it and trees have sprung up. It wakes from the heat of the fire that the seamen kindle and plunges into the waves. During the seventh voyage, a hurricane drives Sinbad’s ship to the ends of the earth, to a kingdom of spirits. The ship’s captain warns that whenever a ship comes to this kingdom of spirits, there rises a great fish out of the sea and swallows up the ship with everything on board. As many as three such fish fancied Sinbad’s ship, one bigger than the next. In a paradox, salvation came from a disaster: the ship

⁵ Cf. also the chapter by Adam Łukaszewicz in this volume, “Fantastic Creatures Seen by a Shipwrecked Sailor and by a Herdsman” (429–437).

crashed on the rocks, and after two days Sinbad reached land floating on a board (Radziwiłł and Zeltzer 1960).

So far we have sought the mythical ancestors of *il Terribile Pescecane* in Greek mythology which originated from the oral traditions of different peoples, in a biblical story, and, finally, we reached to those traditions of different peoples as recorded in collections of their fairy tales and stories.

The connection between Pinocchio's adventure and the story of Jonah was mentioned earlier. It encouraged learned literary scholars to look for deeper meaning in this episode, and also in the whole story about the adventures of a wooden puppet – going beyond the traditional school reading of the book as an educational work about a child's path to adulthood, along which it learns to tell right from wrong, i.e. "how to be a good child" or, in the Disney version (1940 film), how to become "brave, truthful, unselfish" (Guroian 1998).

A theological reading of *The Adventures of Pinocchio* was proposed by Cardinal Giacomo Biffi in his excellent book *Contro maestro Ciliegia. Commento teologico a "Le avventure di Pinocchio"* (1977). Others, arguing that Collodi had been accepted into a Freemason lodge, uncovered hidden gnostic meanings and esoteric interpretations of particular episodes, culminating in the adventure inside the whale's belly, the setting of the final symbolic metamorphosis of the wooden puppet who was turned into a donkey and then turned back into a puppet, but a mature one this time: feeling, sensitive, and responsible, in other words – a human being.

But the closest ancestor of *il Terribile Pescecane* and most of the "big fish" mentioned earlier is definitely a certain whale whose size reached a hundred and fifty miles! It swallowed a ship and its crew who had just escaped death falling from the Moon into the sea. The terrified seamen looked around the monster's insides in the light coming into the whale through its open jaws:

[...] we saw a great cavity, flat all over and high, and large enough for the housing of a great city. In it there were fish, large and small, and many other creatures all mangled, ships' rigging and anchors, human bones and merchandise. In the middle there was land with hills on it [...], indeed a forest of all kinds of trees had grown on it, garden stuff had come up, and everything appeared to be under cultivation. The coast of the island was twenty-seven miles long. Sea birds were to be seen nesting on the trees, gulls and kingfishers.⁶

Like Odysseus on the island of the Cyclops, the narrator and his companions in Lucian of Samosata's *Vera historia* [Ἀληθῆ διηγήματα / A True Story] go off to take a reconnaissance of the place. They meet an old man and his son who have been living there for twenty-seven years off the land and anything they catch in the lake. As it turns out, they are surrounded by hostile and conflicted barbarian peoples that use fish bones as weapons.

⁶ Translation by Austin Morris Harmon in Lucian (1913, 287).

Under the vigorous narrator's leadership, they endeavour by various means to escape. First they try to knock a hole in the animal's side, but this fails. Then they ignite a fire which rages for twelve days. Finally, they prop the monster's jaw apart with masts and make their escape. At this point it is worth mentioning that the idea of making a hole appeared in 2013 in *Percy Jackson: Sea of Monsters*, a movie in which a group of Greek heroes sailing with a crew of zombies on a Confederate battleship called the CSS Birmingham, on a quest for the Golden Fleece, are swallowed by Charybdis and get out by firing cannon at the beast from inside.⁷

The affinity of Collodi's *Pescecane* with the whale from Lucian of Samosata's *A True Story* (and thus also with the "big fish" of Brother Alcripe and Baron Munchausen) offers yet another interpretation of *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, one that is neither educational, esoteric, nor theological. It is namely a treatise on the essence of truth.

When in 2001 the eleven-year-old daughter of an Australian logician gave him Pinocchio's sentence ("My nose is growing / grows / will grow now") as an example of the liar paradox in logic, a huge discussion ensued on the Pinocchio paradox and possible ways of resolving or discarding it (P. Eldridge-Smith and V. Eldridge-Smith 2010).

The issue of truth runs throughout the book. Poor Pinocchio! It took just three harmless and actually unnecessary little lies of the wooden puppet to make its nose so long that as many as a thousand woodpeckers were needed to get it down to its normal size. An obvious question suggests itself: What about the writer's nose? Is this another "Pinocchio paradox"?

Lucian resolves the matter as simply as possible, announcing at the start of *A True Story* that the only true sentence it contains is that it does not contain a word of truth. Sinbad the Sailor in a way internalizes the question of veracity. The account from each of his voyages mentions someone who doubts his improbable adventures, but soon solid evidence emerges that he was telling the truth. Brother Alcripe precedes his stories with the significant motto (quoted also in the opening of this chapter), "Omnis homo mendax", which effectively prevents any accusations that he is lying. Baron Munchausen takes a very different approach, as his account includes an episode that leaves no doubt as to his principled attitude on the matter:

[...] we observed three men hanging to a tall tree by their heels; upon inquiring the cause of their punishment I found they had all been travelers and upon their return home had deceived their friends by describing places they never saw and relating things that never happened; this gave me no concern, as I have ever confined myself to facts. (Raspe 2005, 135)

⁷ The movie is based on the novel (2006) by Rick Riordan, the second installment in the *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* series.

The noses of all our narrators can be saved if we assume that next to lies “with no legs” and lies “with long noses”, there is a third kind of lie – a lie that in a world of talking puppets and whale bellies in which towns are built and wars are waged becomes truth. Therefore *The Adventures of Pinocchio* can be interpreted as a special kind of poetics.

The elite club that could have been founded by ancient travellers who had the opportunity to see around the inside of a “big fish” has been joined by others over the centuries. In the current century, besides Percy Jackson’s “Argonauts” mentioned earlier, a “big fish” was also awakened by Michael Pinson, a student at the school of gods, narrator of the 2004 book for young adults *Nous, les dieux* (in English as: *We, the Gods*) by Bernard Werber. Pinson ended up inside the Leviathan together with another student of the school, Antoine de Saint-Exupery himself, and together they lived through a dramatic journey along the miles-long digestive tract, to finally find the way out and, thanks to the help of some friendly dolphins, narrowly escape with their lives. The writer’s innovative idea, which is also a tribute to the demands of realism, was that he led the characters out of the beast’s belly through... the anus, which they irritated by kicking and punching it until the Leviathan finally discharged the contents of its large intestine into the sea.

Perhaps we should not regret that no crew has ever, at least so far, caught a κῳδαλον of such size or... appetite, or even seen one napping in the waves far away. But if any of you would like to take survival lessons in the belly of a “big fish”, I must warn you, travestying the heraldic motto of a certain famous school:

Cetus dormiens non est titillandum!

Translated into English by Joanna Dutkiewicz

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ADAM ŁUKASZEWICZ

Fantastic Creatures Seen by a Shipwrecked Sailor and by a Herdsman

This paper is neither an analysis of motifs which from time immemorial persist in literature for children, nor an attempt of a synthetic approach to the chosen subject. It is an introductory essay which presents two Egyptian tales. The contents of these two stories, well known to every Egyptologist, may become a subject of further comparative studies by scholars who are interested in the afterlife of ancient mythical stories and their parallels in various cultures.

The classics are no more an isolated field, but are a hybrid science in which the traditional Graeco-Roman world is mixed up with oriental elements. The Graeco-Roman world was closely connected with the Near East. We know, or should know now, that both Greeks and Romans came from countries situated far away, and that their culture is a branch of the eastern civilization, except for some original aspects of literature and philosophy.

The East may be considered the homeland of literature for children, since it is from there that the oldest fairy tales come. Sometimes there is no clear borderline separating the writings for children from stories for adults. Fantastic creatures appear in both. The ancient Egyptian stories of a Shipwrecked Sailor and of a Herdsman will be briefly discussed below. It seems that at least the story of the Shipwrecked Sailor represents motifs which influenced other cultures and are present also in stories for children. The most important echo of the Shipwrecked Sailor survives in the notorious Oriental stories of Sinbad (or, more correctly: Sindbad), also a sailor and a discoverer of unknown islands. The story of the Herdsman is too fragmentary to be assessed or compared with the extant heritage of literature for children. The similitude to stories about mermaids or sirens may be only superficial. Both stories discussed here are internally connected by the presence of unusual creatures.

Undoubtedly the same human imagination, which now finds a powerful expression in creating new shapes of technical devices, in eccentric fashion or bizarre and often ugly works of art and architecture, in the old days also produced unusual animals.

A child can be amused when it imagines a normal animal: an owl or a fox or a bear. Adults are not satisfied with such simple images, especially in the present age of inflation of realistic photographs. When the writer of this chapter was a

child, images of animals, or an imaginary identification with an animal, stimulated his imagination. Visual contact with a real owl or a hedgehog or a pheasant was a memorable event.

Unusual or monstrous creatures are described as portents by classical authors. Someone who had an experience in teratology, who saw a calf with a double head or another pathological creature, may be ready to imagine a Chimaera, a Pegasus, a griffin, a Sphinx or another compound of various real animals. Such images of monsters came to Greece from the East, where their prototypes appeared in art much earlier than the earliest Greek examples. Ancient and medieval geographical writings provided the collective imagination of later times with numerous compounds or distortions of real creatures.

Doctor Dolittle's animal with two heads located on two opposite extremities of the body is a modern artificial invention, which, in fact, was a story created as an antidote to the horror of the WW1. However, in Hugh Lofting's stories, fantastic creatures are very rare. They co-exist with real animals. No difference is made between the two categories. Both can speak their specific languages which can also be understood by a sufficiently gifted human, like Doctor Dolittle.

Unusual qualities of animals and command of animal idioms which are comparable to human speech can be found in Edgar Rice Burrough's story of Tarzan and in Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book*. A soldier of the WW1, an officer of the Polish division in Siberia and of various anti-Bolshevik forces in Asia, later also of the Polish Armed Forces in the WW2 including the Home Army (AK), a traveller and very good writer of novels for children, Kamil Giżycki (1893–1968), who had an experience as a landowner in Africa, wrote excellent African stories in Polish (1960, first publ. 1949), now completely forgotten even in the author's homeland. It is only natural that his animals speak.

Dragons and similar beasts fill the pages of books for children. I wonder why the authors insist, without real necessity, on the imaginary character of these creatures. Maybe some of those animals are not entirely imaginary. They may reflect some vanished species.

In the ancient Near East, there was a rich variety of representations of hybrid or bizarre animals. In Egypt, the animal of the god Seth, considered by most Egyptologists a stylized depiction of a real animal (African wild dog, okapi, aardvark, etc.) or a product of imagination (cf., e.g., te Velde 1967), is possibly an image of a lost species. Also, the animal of Anubis, usually considered a jackal or wild dog, might in the present writer's opinion be in reality an extinct canid (Wilkinson 2003, 188–190; DuQuesne 2005). One of the interpretations of the animal of Anubis is the "Egyptian jackal" or *Canis lupaster* (Yoyotte 1959, 44, s.v. "chacal"). Otherwise the animal was simply called a "wolf".¹

¹ "Wolves" in a papyrus text UPZ II 187.19 (127/126 BC), cf. Hengstl, Häg, and Kühnert (1978, 148–151, No. 57). The Egyptian "wolves" are mentioned by Henryk Sienkiewicz in his novel for young readers *W pustyni i w puszczy* [In Desert and

The serpopard (a panther or lycaon with an extremely long neck) seems to be only an artistic transformation of the known zoological reality.² However, if there were no living giraffes left, this animal would perhaps be considered a fantastic creature. By the way, a giraffe was in Antiquity considered a hybrid, a mixture of camel and panther. This is evident from the Latin name of giraffe (*camelopardalis*).

The existence of fantastic creatures is confirmed by the official records of the Polish city of Toruń. In 1746 a dragon approximately two metres long was seen there, according to a written declaration confirmed by oath of respectable citizens.³

When I was a child, I was almost ready to accept at face value the story about the last pterodactyl brought from a forgotten plateau in South America to London, according to the novel *The Lost World* (1912) by Arthur Conan Doyle. At the end of the exciting narrative, that creature flew away in London. I always wondered what happened to the poor animal in the enormous agglomeration. Of course, Conan Doyle's pterodactyl in London was even more fantastic than the dragon in Toruń.

The ancient Egyptian story of the Shipwrecked Sailor, which is a part of the Egyptian classics, also contains a description of a monstrous fantastic animal (Golénischeff 1913, plates I–VIII; cf. de Buck 1948, 100–106; Foster 1992, 24–41; Parkinson 1997, 89–101; Hilbig 2012). This text on papyrus was published by the great Russian Egyptologist Vladimir Semyonovich Golenishchev [Golénischeff] (1856–1947).

The story is an account of an expedition sent from a harbour of the Red Sea to the mines in the Sinai Peninsula. A tempest changed the quiet realistic narrative. A great ship with a crew of one hundred and twenty sailors perished, only the narrator was cast on to an island. Now, the fairy tale begins. The island had in it plenty of good things. “There was nothing that was not in it” (Łukaszewicz 2015, 31; cf. Papyrus Hermitage 1115.51–52 in Golénischeff 1913). The Shipwrecked Sailor ate well and even made an offering to the gods (Łukaszewicz 2015, 31; cf. Papyrus Hermitage 1115.55–56 in Golénischeff 1913).

Soon, however, he met the master of the island. It was a genuine fabulous creature – an enormous snake, 30 Egyptian cubits (almost 16 metres) long. His body was covered with gold, his beard and eyebrows were of lapis lazuli, the

Wilderness, 1911]; in a more recent edition (Sienkiewicz 1954) wolves appear on p. 45, where also a difference is made between these animals and “a jackal”.

² Narmer Palette (cf. Wilkinson 1999, 6); Oxford Palette, Minor Hierakonpolis Palette (Craig Patch 2012, 139).

³ The original document is now lost. It seems that it was for the last time seen in the 1960s; before and after, it was mentioned several times, including Petrykowski (1983). Now, the available information concerning this event is a caption accompanying a sculpture representing the dragon, which can be seen in the Old Town of Toruń.

blue stone of the gods. The giant snake took the Sailor to his nest. After an interrogation of the newcomer, the snake spoke to the Sailor in a friendly way. He forecasted the Sailor's return to his homeland and his further happy life. Undoubtedly the snake was a god. However, he was also subject to misfortune. The snake told the Sailor that one day a star fell down and burnt his whole family, 75 snakes in number, including the young daughter of the great snake, a child born in response to his prayers.

And indeed a ship came soon and brought the Sailor back to Egypt with rich gifts offered by the snake. The almighty lord of this island of plenty (The Island of Ka) presented his guest with all sorts of precious goods. The snake also predicted the imminent disappearance of the island. And indeed, nobody saw the island again.

Mythical islands are often prolific and ruled by beneficent lords. The story of the Shipwrecked Sailor is a prototype of some motifs which later appear in literature. In Homer's *Odyssey*, the information on islands is a mixture of real geography, miscellaneous details, and fantasy. The island of Ithaca is the ideal home of Odysseus, while foreign islands which Odysseus visits in his wanderings are full of curiosities, dangers, and miracles: the island of Aeolus, Scheria of the Phaeacians, Ogygia – the home of the nymph Calypso, etc. (cf. Balabriga 1998; Malkin 1998; Finley 2002). The island of Pharos also known from the *Odyssey* (4.354–357) was situated near the coast of Egypt and was the home of an unusual divinity connected with the sea and named Proteus. Proteus was able to take – among other forms – the shape of a snake (Grimal 1951, s.v. "Proteus").

Later it was, among others, Euhemerus of Messene, who claimed to have travelled in the late fourth century BC (reign of Cassander, king of Macedon, 305–297 BC) to the Indian Ocean,⁴ where he landed on the miraculous island called Panchaea. The island was fruitful, possessed many wild beasts and was inhabited by a well organized society (Diodorus Siculus 5.41–46).⁵

The stories of the *Arabian Nights*, a basis of adaptations beloved by children, are full of islands, especially in the narratives of the adventures of Sindbad the Sailor.⁶ Innumerable versions of these stories and adaptations in popular culture are a separate subject which will not be discussed here (cf., e.g., Strang 1896). The examples concerning islands mentioned below are based on an excellent and original Polish version (first published 1913) of the Sindbad stories by Bolesław Leśmian (1877–1937), the best adaptation of this part of *The Thousand and One*

⁴ On Euhemerus and his narrative cf. Diod. Sic. 6.1.4–11; cf. Winiarczyk (2013).

⁵ For the situation of Panchaea cf. Diod. Sic. 5.42.4–6; for the description of fauna and flora cf. Diod. Sic. 5.43 and 5.45.1; for the social organization cf. Diod. Sic. 5.45.3–6 and 5.46.1–3. Cf. also Diodorus Siculus (2018, 58–66).

⁶ I deliberately reject the recent simplified and etymologically misleading form "Sinbad".

Nights ever written (Leśmian 1955). For several decades this delightful collection of stories was a beloved book for children in Poland. Some islands presented therein are friendly, others are dangerous. Worst of all is an island which in reality is a whale that dived rapidly when irritated by a bonfire lit by sailors on the supposed soil, which suddenly began to smell of fried fish – it is a matter of course that a whale is not a fish (Leśmian 1955, 18–20; cf. Weil and Appel 2011, 109–110).⁷

A dangerous magnetic mountain was also situated on an island (Leśmian 1955, 84). On that island, according to Leśmian's version, there was a monument which represented an individual who would come back to life when called a genius and turned again into a silent statue when called a donkey (83). It seems to be a true allegory of a celebrity of our days, dependent on whimsical public opinion. Another island was completely devastated since the fauna and flora died out as a result of terrible noise made by the gongs of a wicked sorcerer named Degial (29).⁸

A close parallel to the great snake, the lord of the island of the Egyptian story of the Shipwrecked Sailor, is Captain Nemo of Jules Verne's *L'Île mystérieuse* (1874). In the story of the mysterious island, a classic of literature for young readers, Nemo appears as a hidden benefactor to a group of survivors who landed in a balloon on an island which was a world *en miniature*. Although the island was rich in everything, the new Robinsons needed some help, and they obtained it in an almost miraculous way from someone who had a kind of divine power resulting from advanced technology of the nineteenth century. At the end of the story, the identity of the saviour is revealed. However, in the closing section of Verne's novel, that lone fighter against the entire world, the old heroic captain Nemo died. (Verne first had conceived him as a Polish nobleman, a fugitive after the fall of the January Uprising of 1863, but under the influence of the editor, the author changed the origin of his hero.) The fortuitous dwellers of his island were rescued by a ship. Soon, the island disappeared after a volcanic eruption. The parallel to the Egyptian tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor is striking.

Returning to other fabulous creatures, we should not overlook the story of the Herdsman. It is a mysterious and very fragmentary story, without beginning and end. Only 25 lines of the original text remain on a papyrus which was cleaned to make the writing material re-usable (Gardiner 1909, 15 and plates 16–17).⁹

A Herdsman was with his team and with his cattle on a meadow among the swamps of the Egyptian Delta. When the chief Herdsman went down to the swamp which bordered with the low ground, he saw a woman whose appearance made his hair stand on end. The interpretation of the fragment is not easy. Earlier

⁷ Cf. also the chapter by Małgorzata Borowska in this volume (419–428).

⁸ For a short and less colourful mention of the island, cf. Weil and Appel (2011, 114).

⁹ French translations in Maspero (1911, 283) and Lefebvre (1949, 27–28); a German translation in Brunner-Traut (1963, 42); English version in Erman (1995, 35–36).

Egyptology translated it so, that her tresses and the bright colour of her skin were fearful. Later the skin was described as smooth (Brunner-Traut 1963, 284). Now the skin is interpreted as bristly (Schneider 2007).

The terror came from the non-human look of the woman with bristles. The Herdsman told his fellows: “Never will I do what she said, since dread is in my body” (verses 7–8 of the Egyptian text in Schneider 2007, 312; cf. Łukaszewicz 2015, 28).

The next morning it was decided to depart to another pasture. A spell against crocodiles was to be recited. At dawn, the Herdsman went back to the swamp. He saw the woman again. She stripped off her clothes and disarrayed her hair (Brunner-Traut 1963, 42). Both activities have an obvious sexual aspect. In this exciting moment, the text breaks off.

The erotic elements are visible in the story. To us, however, the nature of the woman is more interesting than the question whether the Herdsman had sex with her. The woman with bristles can be possibly explained as a variant of the lion-goddess Sakhmet, or perhaps Bastet. However, the natural fur of the woman is not a sufficient basis for such an interpretation. The strange creature seems to be connected with water. The look of her skin does not present a problem. Animals with fur, like otters, castors etc., also live in water.

Perhaps we have here a kind of water goddess, similar to a naiad or a water nymph. Such creatures are uncommon in Egypt but appear abundantly in Greek mythology. We also know the little mermaid of fairy tales or the half woman, half fish of the more recent version of the Warsaw legend. They are also frequent in literature for children.

It is noteworthy that a recent story known to the writer only from a fortuitous piece of information contained in a film, insists on the alleged existence of water-people, a branch of the human race which, like many other mammals, in the course of evolution went to waters, the element covering the majority of the surface of the Earth. The story has no actual evidence to confirm it. If we take this fantasy at face value, the supposed race of water-people, now perhaps already extinct, could have existed in Antiquity. *Se non è vero, è ben trovato*. Anyway, we can insert this modern legend into the category of stories about the survival of man-apes, the yeti, etc. Genuine sea mammals, like dolphins, are also heroes of tales created by the ancient Greek imagination. These stories infiltrated as well modern literature for children. The famous story of Arion and the dolphin (Herodotus 1.23; Ovid, *Fasti* 2.79–118; cf. Grimal 1951, s.v. “Arion”) has a number of modern versions for young readers, including films and texts available online. However, the meaning of the tale of the Herdsman is not clear, and it is still possible that the enigmatic story relates an encounter with a feline divinity and not with a water goddess.

Already in Antiquity the mysterious appeal of the sea entered both narratives for young readers and for adults. Sea monsters as well as the inhabitants of unknown islands or water divinities are present on pages of such stories. A

global analysis of these stories remains to be done. It will most probably demonstrate the similitude of many species of fantastic creatures in tales from all parts of the world. The roots of such tales must reach the Palaeolithic, when the imagination of the human race made its first attempts to fill the unknown with conceivable images.

The modern world has no place for unknown geographic areas and unknown animals. Even the abyss of the oceans has been explored. Today, the unknown beings can only inhabit planets far away. The future writers of literature for children will have either to play with the traditional fantastic creatures considered as the fauna of the realm of imagination or to suggest that their creatures are beyond our reach and exist in the remote regions of the universe.

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ROBERT A. SUCHARSKI

Stanisław Pagaczewski and His Tale(s) of the Wawel Dragon

We are to discuss dragons in the literature for children and young adults. It is an important and very dangerous topic, so we have to be deadly serious. It therefore makes sense to start with a serious publication, a kind of encyclopaedia, namely the *Manual de zoología fantástica* written by the eminent Argentinian author Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986) in collaboration with Margarita Guerrero and published in 1957.¹ We read therein:

EL DRAGÓN

UNA GRUESA y alta serpiente con garras y alas es quizá la descripción más fiel del dragón. Puede ser negro, pero conviene que también sea resplandeciente; asimismo suele exigirse que exhale bocanadas de fuego y de humo. Lo anterior se refiere, naturalmente, a su imagen actual; los griegos parecen haber aplicado su nombre a cualquier serpiente considerable. (Borges and Guerrero 1957, 20–21)

The Western Dragon. A tall-standing, heavy serpent with claws and wings is perhaps the description that best fits the Dragon. It may be black, but it is essential that it also be shining; equally essential is that it belch forth fire and smoke. The above description refers, of course, to its present image; the Greeks seem to have applied the name Dragon to any considerable reptile. (Borges and Guerrero 1974, 153–154)

If we continue to read Borges' article, we learn that in Western culture the dragon is a creature thought of as evil, one that evokes terror, hurts people, and ravages their possessions. However, this is not the only representation of the dragon in Western literature. When we examine the works of Ursula K. Le Guin (1929–2018), a renowned expert and authority on dragons, we find a different

¹ The book was expanded, and finally published under the title *El libro de los seres imaginarios* in 1969. It was revised, enlarged, and translated into English by Norman Thomas di Giovanni in collaboration with the author, and published as *The Book of Imaginary Beings* in the USA in 1969 and in the UK in 1970, and in Poland (maintaining the original title) as *Zoologia fantastyczna*, translated by Zofia Chądzyńska in 1983.

picture of the mythical animal. Thus, in *The Farthest Shore* (1972), a novel belonging to the Earthsea cycle, we find a beautiful passage in which Ged-Sparrowhawk, the Archmage of the Earthsea instructs Lebannen-Arren, his young apprentice, companion, and the future King of the Earthsea, on the nature of dragons:

The dragons! The dragons are avaricious, insatiable, treacherous; without pity, without remorse. But are they evil? Who am I, to judge the acts of dragons?... They are wiser than men are. It is with them as with dreams, Arren. We men dream dreams, we work magic, we do good, we do evil. The dragons do not dream. They are dreams. They do not work magic: it is their substance, their being. They do not do; they are. (Le Guin 2015, Kindle loc. 572)

Dragons are therefore creatures beyond good and evil in the human understanding of the words and they are wise. In the subsequent and last novel in the series *The Other Wind* (2001), Le Guin shows how in fact dragons and men once represented the same species, and the differences between the two arose when dragons chose freedom and men – possessions. Men did even worse, for by means of a spell they stole dragons' land from them to create a place for an artificial afterlife, and thus broke the cycle of death and rebirth. What is needed is reconciliation and this is finally done by Tehanu, the Archmage's adoptive daughter, who is a severely injured, burned human girl and at the same time a dragon. Le Guin teaches us therefore that the conflict between men and dragons is in fact illusory, and that if there is someone to be blamed for this conflict, it is human beings for their insatiable craving to acquire and possess. Dragons therefore appear not as malevolent and wicked, but rather as helpful creatures and sometimes even salutary and beneficial for humankind, and being such, they remind us of the picture of the mythical *lung* from the Far East – China (Borges 1974, 42–43).

It goes without saying that such a picture may seem to be much more appropriate in books for children than the traditional one we can find in Borges' encyclopaedia. It is therefore no wonder that it had been used even before Le Guin's work. In 1965 Stanisław Pagaczewski (1916–1984), a Polish author (mainly of books for children) and poet, published his first novel on the adventures of the Wawel Dragon (in Polish: Smok Wawelski) entitled *Porwanie Baltazara Gąbki* [The Abduction of Baltazar Sponge]. Ten years later (in 1975) a new book appeared, *Misja profesora Gąbki* [The Mission of Professor Sponge], and the series was continued in 1979 with the novel *Gąbka i latające talerze* [Sponge and the Flying Saucers].² The series is finally brought to a close with a

² The books were also published together for the first time in 2011 by Wydawnictwo Literackie as *Przygody Baltazara Gąbki. Trylogia* [The Adventures of Baltazar Sponge: Trilogy].

kind of coda entitled *Przygoda na Rodos* [Adventure on Rhodes] published in 1982.³

Although three first books bear the name of Professor Gąbka [Professor Sponge] it is clear that the Wawel Dragon is the main character and *spiritus movens* of the entire cycle. Therefore, an interesting question is when we meet this figure for the first time in Polish history. To find him one should go back to the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries AD, when Mistrz Wincenty Kadłubek (Magister Vincentius Kadłubko, 1161–1223), the future bishop of Kraków and a figure eventually beatified by the Catholic Church, wrote in Latin his *Chronica seu originale regum et principum Polonorum* (also called the *Chronica Polonorum*) as a kind of dialogue between two people: Jan (John, Archbishop of Gniezno) and Mateusz (Matthew, Bishop of Kraków). Already in the first book of the *Chronicle* (I, 5–7) we read a story in which Gracc(h)us, i.e. Krak Prince of Kraków, appears together with the monster presented under the pseudo-Greek term *holophagus* ('whole-devourer') presumably coined by Kadłubek himself. Told in brief, the plot of the story goes like this:

Graccus I has two sons, the younger of whom also bears this name, so that it is necessary to distinguish between Graccus I and Graccus II. The chief obstacle to the well-being of the kingdom is the monster Holophagus – the name simply describing his voracity – who is devastating the region. The monster lives in the cliffs of a mountain, and the inhabitants of the surrounding area are forced at intervals to sacrifice to him a set number of livestock in order to gratify his appetite for flesh. If this toll is not met, the monster consumes an equivalent number of human beings. Given the gravity of the situation, Graccus I proposes to his sons that succession should fall upon the one who defeats the monster. The sons then defeat the monster by means of a ruse that takes advantage of his voracity: in place of the livestock that is normally the monster's due, they set a skin full of burning sulphur that the Holophagus greedily gobbles; the Holophagus then dies of suffocation from the smoke of the flames inside. The younger son, however – Graccus II – then kills the elder, and claims the merit of having defeated the monster. When the deceit is exposed, he is punished and condemned to perpetual exile. Archbishop John's moral reflections upon the tale then follow, and occupy all of chapter I.6. These are then followed in turn by the tale of the foundation of Krakow [*sic!*] on the site where the monster had lived. (Álvarez-Pedrosa 2009, 165–166)

This story as presented by Kadłubek is only the first version. As happens often, the story was enriched with various elements in course of time. We shall present here only the major versions: in *Annales seu cronicae incliti Regni Poloniae* [Annals or Chronicles of the Famous Kingdom of Poland] by Jan Długosz (Ioannes Longinus *viz.* Długossius, 1415–1480) it is Krak himself who kills the monster by feeding him animal bodies filled with burning sulphur, touchwood,

³ Also published by Wydawnictwo Literackie.

wax, and tar (book 1, chapter *Graccus arcem et civitatem Cracoviensem aedificat, draco ingens latitans sub arce, incolis onerosus, occiditur*: “iactanda monstro corpora sulphure iussit, et caumate parum igne contacta, cera atque pice impleri, et belue exponi”). Finally, in 1597 according to the *Kronika polska Marcina Bielskiego nowo przez Joachima Bielskiego syna jego wydana* [Martin Bielski’s Polish Chronicle as Newly Edited by His Son Joachim Bielski (Joachim Volscius Bilscius, 1540–1599)] it is a cobbler named Skuba who suggests to Krak the idea of feeding the monster a calf filled with sulphur. The monster, dying of fire and thirst, drinks water from the Vistula River to death (book 1, chapter *Crakus ábo Krok, Monárchá Polski* [Crakus or Krak, the King of Poland]).

There has been a lasting debate on the originality of the story. It is quite evident that the legend of the Wawel Dragon is somehow comparable to the story we know from the appendix to the Book of Daniel known as *Bel and the Dragon*, regarded by both Catholic and Orthodox Christians as a canonical part of the Bible while Protestants consider it apocryphal (see, e.g., Kręcidło 2011, 11). However, there have been scholars who argued in favour of the original local folktale, while others claimed Kadłubek’s own idea and emphasized the moral overtones of his chronicle. Still others looked to the Indo-European myth of dragon-slaying or they searched for Greek sources (for example, the legend of the founding of Thebes by Cadmus). Finally, some suggested a historical reference (at first glance quite astonishing) to the Avars (Strzelczyk 1998, 190–191). In any case, the Wawel Dragon plays the role of the weaker and defeated.

Marian Plezia, following on publications by Siegmund Fränkel (1907) and Stanisław Ciszewski (1910), noticed a very close similarity between the legend of the Wawel Dragon and *The Romance of Alexander*, the authorship of which is credited to an unidentified writer, active perhaps in the third century AD and known as Pseudo-Callisthenes (Plezia 1971, 21–32). *The Alexander Romance* exists in many versions and languages, of which the Latin one, written by Archpresbyter Leo from Naples in the tenth century AD (cf. Landgraf 1885; Pfister 1913), was of course the most used in Western Europe. Plezia, after Fränkel, cites the Syriac and Coptic/Ethiopian version of the *Romance*. In the English translation of the Coptic/Ethiopian version we read the following (Alexander the Great is speaking):

And we departed from that place, and marching on we arrived at a vast and mighty mountain, and those who dwelt therein said unto us, “O king, thou art not able to march through this mountain, for in it there [dwelleth] a mighty god who is like unto a monster serpent, and he preventeth every one who would go unto him.” And I said unto them, “Where is this being who ye say is your god?” And it was told me that he [lived] in the mountain by the river, above which was a dense forest, at a distance of about three days’ journey. And I said unto them, “Doth he appear unto you in the form of a man?” and they said “Nay, but the sound of his voice restraineth whosoever would journey to him, and he devoureth buffaloes.”

And I said, "How know ye those things, and that he is in this wise, since ye are not able to come unto him?" And they said, "We know that he devoureth multitudes of buffaloes which come to the river, and these in addition to the two oxen which we send to him each day that he may not lay waste our country, for he devoureth everything which travelleth by the river." And I said, "Where do they bring the two oxen to him, that he may eat them?" And they said unto me, "O king, two of our men are appointed for this work, and they rise up early in the morning and set the two oxen in their place for him before he cometh forth from his dwelling, and they leave them on the bank of the river; then they return and ascend that high mountain. And when the god goeth forth from his dwelling to the river, he findeth the two oxen and devoureth them." And I said unto them, "Doth he do thus in one place or everywhere?" Now I asked this question concerning him because he was [held by] the people of the whole country at that time to be a devil, whom they worshipped, and [they thought that] he fought for them and for their country.

Then I asked them to lead me to the place wherein the god lived, and I took guides with me, and I went to him. And when we arrived at his dwelling-place I commanded the people of the city to bring out to me two oxen, and I set them where they were wont to set the oxen for him from olden time; then I commanded my army to stand round about on the mountain. Now, when the god went forth from his place, I watched him, and behold he was a mighty beast like unto the darkness of a cloud, and a flame of fire went forth from his mouth; and when he had drawn nigh to the two oxen he devoured them. And I watched the whole of his doings. And on the morrow I commanded them not to set the cattle for him, so that he might become hungry, and on the third day, when hunger waxed strong in him, he came out against us. And when he drew nigh to us I commanded my army, and they cried out at him with mighty cries, and they beat the drums, and they blew blasts on the horns, and they made a great noise; now when the god heard the noise he was terrified and turned back to his place. Thereupon I commanded the people of the city to bring out to me two huge buffaloes, and I slew them and stripped off their skins. And I commanded them to fill their skins with pitch, and with sulphur, and with deadly poison, and with iron hooks, and to carry them to the place where they were wont to bring [the oxen] to him. Now when the beast went forth from the forest to the river, it found the skins which had been filled and it devoured them as it had been accustomed to do. And after it had devoured them, and the poison had entered into its paunch, it wanted to vomit, but the iron hooks which I had fastened in the skins stuck in its throat; and it fell down and dug its fore and hind claws into the ground, and every tree which came in its way it plucked up by the roots with its tail, by reason of the fierceness of the fire which burned inside it. Now when I saw this I ordered them to kindle a fire with brazen bellows, and I cast heated stones into its mouth; and when the fire reached the poison, and sulphur, and pitch which were in its paunch, it died a terrible death; and everyone who saw it marvelled. Now this beast had been a dwelling-place for fiends and devils, and it had laid waste all the district round about. (Budge 1896, 166–169)

The Ethiopian version of Alexander's encounter with and slaying of the dragon actually resembles much of what we know of the tale of the Prince Krak and the Wawel Dragon. The question naturally appears how it happened that such an exotic version of the *Romance* might have been known to Kadłubek. Plezia ascertains that the Kraków scholar might have heard of the Arabic/Eastern varieties of the *Romance* while studying in Italy and France. This is of course a hypothesis, but the argument that Plezia brings makes it quite likely (1971, 29–30).

Whatever sources were used in Kadłubek's and his successors' chronicles, in Pagaczewski's cycle the situation is entirely changed. The Wawel Dragon has survived, the sheep filled with sulphur is only a bad memory, and the enmity between the creature and Prince Krak has changed into such a deep friendship as might have occurred only in the eighth century AD, since the plot is set at that time. Krakostan, the country ruled by Krak, is rich, developed, and friendly to its inhabitants. It differs significantly from the image of the Middle Ages to which we have become accustomed. Radio, the telegraph, and even cars are in common use, but we have to admit that the Wawel Dragon has made significant improvements in engine design and his automobile/amphibious vehicle is water-fuelled! Krak and the Dragon have one more friend, Prof. Baltazar Gąbka [Sponge], famous for his monograph on the nerve endings in the mouth of the Roman snail. In *The Abduction of Baltazar Sponge* the Professor disappears in the Kraina Deszczowców [Land of Raincoats], so the Wawel Dragon goes on a rescue mission accompanied by the excellent chef Bartolomeo Bartolini (whose coat of arms is a green parsley), and Dr. Koyote, the physician. The team is followed by Don Pedro, a mysterious spy from the Land of Raincoats. Searching for the Professor they travel through the Kraina Psiogłowców [Land of the Dog-Headed], the Słonecja [Sunshine Kingdom], and Kraina Gburowatego Hipopotama [Land of the Boorish Hippopotamus]. They meet some very nice robbers and the dragon Mlekopij [Milkdrinker] and finally they save the famous scientist from the hands of the Największy Deszczowiec [Greatest Raincoat] and his accomplice, the dreadful Pan Mżawka [Mr. Drizzle].

In the next volume of the cycle *The Mission of Professor Sponge*, the team studies and tries to understand the habits of the mysterious "mypyngs", hairless bipedal humanoids that are as voracious as locusts and ravage Krak's country each year. The expedition is disturbed by the Greatest Raincoat and Mr. Drizzle, but at the end the exploratory mission finds the very reason for the mypyngs' annual invasion, namely a drought in their country: the current of a river is changed and everything ends very happily. In the third book *Sponge and the Flying Saucers* the friends move to the twentieth century where they meet remarkable people of our contemporary world, become celebrities themselves, and the Wawel Dragon fights the infamous Kraków smog (a pun on the Polish word *smok* meaning 'dragon' and *smog* meaning 'smog'). Finally, the friends, on a

bike excursion, meet extraterrestrials with whose help they return to the eighth century.

The two first volumes of the cycle were adapted by Studio Filmów Rysunkowych [The Studio of Cartoon Films] as cartoon films (with some minor changes from the literary original): *Porwanie Baltazara Gąbki* [The Abduction of Baltazar Sponge, 1969–1970] and *Wyprawa Profesora Gąbki* [The Expedition of Professor Sponge, 1978–1980] and became very popular, leading me to wonder whether there is a single Polish child who has never heard about the Wawel Dragon. (It is of course well known also among adults, cf., e.g., the theatre performances *Helidra: The European Literary Heritage Meets the Dragon in the Street*.⁴)

The figure of the Wawel Dragon in the first three novels by Pagaczewski is a clear reminder of Alexander the Great as portrayed in the *Romance*; one can even say that it was somehow based upon it. Both are courageous, fearless, and righteous, do great deeds, travel around the world and make great discoveries. They are also trustworthy in every way, faithful to their friends and dedicated to those whom they have taken under their custody. It is also worth remembering that in accordance with the *Romance*, Alexander is not, in principle, a natural son of Philip but of Nectanebus, the Egyptian wizard-king who could take the form of a serpent/dragon, and that the Greek word δράκων means both and is associated with a belief in the mesmerizing power of the animal's eyes.⁵ In addition, because of the fact that Kadłubek does not use the Latin word *draco* (which is otherwise known to him; in fact, Latin is the language he chose for his chronicle) while describing our hero, but rather introduces the new pseudo-Greek word *holophagus*, some researchers have tried to deny the “dragonness” of the Wawel Dragon (Sikorski, 2012). However, because of the fact (as we read in Martin Stejskal's book, 2011, 41–42) that any reptile which has not been seen by human eyes for seven years becomes a dragon and especially because the Wawel Dragon himself declares his consanguinity with the dinosaurs and the dragon named Milkdrinker, we can omit such opinions and ascertain that the Wawel Dragon is a unique humanoid dragon in history.

The “reality of the medieval” of the Kraków in Pagaczewski's writings differs significantly from the “reality of Antiquity” and is a rather humorous mirror to the Poland of the 1960s and 1970s. Direct references to Antiquity are quite rare, the most obvious probably being the name of Prof. Sponge's dog Ares. True Greekness (and an additionally much opener derision of the Poland of

⁴ *Helidra* is a collaborative project between four different types of open-space theatre companies from Greece, Poland, France, and Bulgaria promoting experimentation in innovative theatre forms and genres through the medium of “Street Theatre”. See the project website at <<http://www.tbp.org.pl/helidra.html>>. Web. 7 January 2016.

⁵ Cf. Beekes (2010, I, 351): “δράκων, -οντος [m.] ‘dragon, serpent’ [...]. On the assumption that the dragon was named after his paralyzing sight [...], δράκων is probably related to δέρομαι”.

those days) in the stories by Pagaczewski manifests itself in an already indisputable manner in the last and least known novel about the Wawel Dragon, *The Adventure on Rhodes*. The plot is set at the end of the 1970s. We do not meet directly either the Dragon, Krak, Professor Gąbka, or Bartolomeo Bartolini, as they had been transported by extraterrestrials back to the eighth century in the final part of *The Mission of Professor Sponge*. Pagaczewski himself is now the main character. Having been invited to the Slovak town of Smokovec (this place-name chosen in order to, again, make a pun on the Polish word *smok* ‘dragon’) for the Second Congress of the International Society for Dragon Research, he presents the dracontologists with the story of the abduction of the Wawel Dragon by aliens. By then, already as an honorary member of the Society, he is invited to join a scouting trip to the Greek island of Rhodes, known for its Malpasso Dragon killed by the knight Dieudonné de Gozon (Hasluck 1913–1914), to lay the groundwork for the next Society congress to be held there. The arrangements for the next congress, led by a four-member team of dragon lovers, should also be combined with the search for the legendary Smokonia, the homeland of the dragons; a map of this country, drawn by the Wawel Dragon, is in the hands of Pagaczewski. The pirates, whom we know from the previous volume *Sponge and the Flying Saucers* reappear and kidnap all four our heroes, but the latter are set free by a Rhodian goat herder named Andreios. The adventure is set for a happy ending and suddenly – in an airplane from Athens to Warsaw – Pagaczewski unfolds the map of Greece upside down and draws attention to the inverted outline of the island of Crete. Its outline turns out to be identical with that of Smokonia, the island from which the great-grandfather of the Wawel Dragon moved to the Wawel Castle. The Wawel Dragon is therefore a descendant of a “Greek” émigré, and the whole Greek staffage of Pagaczewski’s stories suddenly takes on another and fuller meaning. It is a proof, although revealed in a humorous way, of the vivacity of ancient myths, and the testimony of the Mediterranean heritage in Polish culture.

Let us conclude in Latin:

Stanislai Pagaczewski fabulae de Dracone Vavelensi Graecae sunt,
tamen leguntur nec non legantur!

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HELEN LOVATT

Fantastic Beasts and Where They Come From: How Greek Are Harry Potter's Mythical Animals?

I stand for the old-fashioned values of traditional literature, classical poetry, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Dickens, Shakespearean plays, and the great writers who will still be read in future years by those children whose parents adopt a protective attitude towards ensuring that dark, demonic literature, carefully sprinkled with ideas of magic, of control and of ghostly and frightening stories that will cause the children who read them to seek for ever more sensational things to add to those they have already been exposed to.

Graeme Whiting (2016), Acorn School, Nailsworth, UK

In this blog post¹ a UK head teacher caused controversy by treating the Harry Potter stories as a malevolent form of literature, “dark” and “demonic”, in a way that applies a religious framework to the aesthetic and moral value of children’s literature. Mythical beasts are one of the most eye-catching and distinctive aspects of popular engagement with Greek and Roman culture, but they are also potentially unstable, avatars of monstrosity and dark, demoniacal power. This chapter examines the ways that mythical beasts are used in the Harry Potter universe of J. K. Rowling.

Monsters and mythical beasts are especially attractive to film makers. It is no surprise after the huge success of the Harry Potter films that a second series is being made. The first of these was filmed from a script by Rowling based on the semi-canonical *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (published 2001 for Comic Relief) and was released in November 2016. It features Eddie Redmayne playing Newt Scamander, the future author of the famous Hogwarts textbook, on a trip to New York, in which he accidentally releases a number of dangerous magical beasts from an expandable brief-case.²

¹ While Whiting’s original blog post (*The Imagination of the Child*), the source of this epigraph, has now been removed from the school site, there is record of it elsewhere: Horovitz (2016), links to various other records of the post and reactions to it, including an article in the *Guardian* newspaper (Shannon 2016).

² A second film, *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald* (dir. David Yates), was released in 2018, but unfortunately too late to be discussed in this paper.

This chapter explores the Greek heritage of Harry Potter's fantastic beasts, not just in the first *Fantastic Beasts* film (dir. David Yates), but also the original bestiary, the Harry Potter novels (and films) from which the bestiary sprang. How Greek are they, and how are they portrayed? How does the Greek mythology fit into the overarching narratives? How do the portrayals of mythical beasts in the Potterverse negotiate questions of the relationship between animals and people, beasts and monsters, magical and non-magical? I start by putting this aspect of the Potterverse into the context of Rowling's general engagement with classical culture, then look at the text of the original *Fantastic Beasts* book, investigating the origins of the creatures and their aetiological functions, move on to a case study of the basilisk and the phoenix in *Chamber of Secrets* (1998), and finish by exploring beasts, monsters, and definitions in both book and film of *Fantastic Beasts*.

Harry Potter and the Classics

The Harry Potter universe brings many different mythological and literary traditions together, in its creatures as much as its storylines and settings.³ Rowling took classical modules at university, and there are many classical names, classical references, and Latin phrases throughout the books.⁴ But there is no direct, clear relationship between Rowling's world and the ancients: instead we confront the fuzziness, complexity, and imprecision of classical reception.⁵ As Peter Wiseman (aka *Sapiens*) pointed out, wizarding is envisaged as going back to the

³ Cornelia Rémi (2004–2019) gives much excellent Harry Potter bibliography. Most useful were: Whited (2002); Fenske (2008); Heilman (2008); Nikolajeva (2009); Bell (2013); Hodkinson and Lovatt (2018, 16–24); Lowe (forthcoming). On Harry Potter and school stories: Steege (2002); Galway (2012). On Harry Potter and fantasy: Webb (2015); Spencer (2015), but he is mainly concerned with story patterns and mythical archetypes.

⁴ Peter Wiseman (Petrus Sapiens) details Rowling's classical modules at the University of Exeter: "[...] she took Additional Greek and Roman Studies for the first two years of her four year French degree, including modules on: Greek and Roman Mythology and Historical Thought; Greek and Roman Narrative and Drama. She did not do Latin or Greek at school" (2002, 94). A good summary of the classical elements of Harry Potter is included in Mills (2008); Casta (2014) and Lowe (forthcoming). See also Rowling (1998) and (2001). See also Olechowska (2016) and Walde (2016).

⁵ Lowe (forthcoming, 6): "Greek myth is prominent – but not unique – among other world cultures".

ancient world.⁶ But Quidditch was invented in the medieval period after the decision to use broomsticks for travel. Newt Scamander in *A Brief History of Muggle Awareness of Fantastic Beasts* emphasizes the medieval pedigree of his bestiary:

A glance through Muggle art and literature of the Middle Ages reveals that many of the creatures they now believe to be imaginary were then known to be real. The dragon, the griffin, the unicorn, the phoenix, the centaur – these and more are represented in Muggle works of that period, though usually with almost comical inexactitude. (Rowling 2018, xxv)⁷

While modern zoologists might also laugh at the comical inexactitude of medieval representations of animals, Scamander presents medieval bestiaries as closer to the truth. Rowling indicates the intertextual roots of the project, and self-consciously highlights her own indebtedness. Arguably classics is important in Harry Potter because it was important in intervening periods, particularly the Middle Ages.

Explicit use of Greek and Roman material creates authority for Rowling and her wizards. One of the two epigraphs at the beginning of *Deathly Hallows* is from Aeschylus (*The Libation Bearers*), and offers a counterpoint to a Christian reading (William Penn, *More Fruits of Solitude*, cf. Rowling 2007, 7); Latin features as a ritual language of power, the language most frequently used in spells (cf. Casta 2014). So how do mythical beasts fit into this complex picture? Lisa Maurice has set the centaurs of Rowling into the context of other children's literature of the twentieth and twenty-first century.⁸ Rowling's centaurs are wise and violent, mysterious and disturbing. Firenze, like Cheiron, teaches and prophesies, but the centaurs defeat and probably rape Dolores Umbridge, symbol of mindless bureaucracy, and repression of student agency and opinions. This resurgence of fantasy in the face of banality and repression remodels our image of classics, which is not associated with book learning and dry but useless

⁶ On the Greek founding fathers of wizardry, see Lowe (forthcoming, 9–11). Ollivander's "have been making fine wands since 362 BC", Wiseman (2002, 93); and the first two historical wizards Ron mentions to Harry as his most sought after cards in his Chocolate Frog collection are those featuring Agrippa and Ptolemy (Rowling 1997, 77).

⁷ Quotations from *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* are taken from the 2018 Bloomsbury edition, originally published in 2001, which is substantially the same as the original edition apart from an additional preface from Newt Scamander setting the book in relation to the film (IX–XIII).

⁸ Cf. Harmon (2013), on otherness and the Forbidden Forest; on centaurs Maurice (2015).

knowledge: in Harry Potter, myth is living, performative, wild and powerful.⁹ However, the centaurs which live in the Forbidden Forest are not just the noble prophets of C. S. Lewis but also the untameable, potential rapists of Ovid (and Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson series).¹⁰ The initial politeness and majesty of the centaurs hides a deep violence and otherness; one might read this as an allegory for ancient societies, which seem on the surface similar and attractive, but hide deep difference and violence, particularly sexual violence. The reference to the centaurs as "an ancient people" seems almost like a metaliterary nod to the fact that Rowling has re-established the wildness of centaurs in contradiction to the traditions of children's literature, such as Lewis, which bowdlerize them by taming.¹¹

Maurice argues from theoretical approaches, developed by the discipline of animal studies, that animals and adolescents have a special affinity as groups which were recognized as oppressed at the same period. She sees Rowling as both hierarchical and colonialist: "Wizards, Muggles, Squibs, house elves, goblins, gnomes, giants, leprechauns, Veela and of course centaurs, all have their clearly defined place, and the wizard is firmly at the top of the pyramid" (2015, 163). This is true to a certain extent, but *Fantastic Beasts* is very concerned with problematization of hierarchies, both through open reflection in the text on what counts as "beast" and what as "being", and through the graffiti of Ron and Harry in "his" copy of this manual (and through Hagrid's subversive attitudes in the whole series).

This becomes even more important in the film adaptation of *Fantastic Beasts*: for the first time, a Muggle, Jacob Kowalski, is a major protagonist, introducing potential new viewers to the Harry Potter universe through his naïveté. The love story between Jacob and Queenie provides much of the emotional impact for the film, which is driven by the higher level of segregation in Rowling's America, where Muggles and wizards are not allowed to intermarry. The fact that it is not really possible to separate the two sides of the centaur, the wild and the noble, is characteristic of Rowling's universe: they decide rationally and collectively to attack Umbridge, and to refuse to take part in human society for their own reasons. As Edith Hall suggests in her chapter "Cheiron as Youth Author: Ancient Example, Modern Responses" (301–326), this union of

⁹ The image of the ancient world coming to life has long been a powerful part of fantasy literature for children, such as Edith Nesbit's *The Enchanted Castle* (1907), in which the statues in the garden of a great house come to life, and at the end of C. S. Lewis' *Prince Caspian* (1951), in which Bacchus forms a *deus ex machina*. On Ovid and Lewis, see Miles (2018) and Slater (2018).

¹⁰ On the connection with Lewis, see Maurice (2015, 149). The apartheid of the Harry Potter universe is a key-stone of its generic status as fantasy, but something that Rowling is continually problematizing, and the film of *Fantastic Beasts* is fundamentally concerned with deconstructing this opposition.

¹¹ On the domestication of mythology in Narnia, see Harrisson (2010).

opposites is particularly Greek. Animals are apart from and different from humans, but not necessarily better or worse than them, just as Muggles and wizards can both be better and worse than each other.

The centaurs of Harry Potter deconstruct the oppositions between knowledge and violence, civilization (especially as manifested through the education system) and destruction. The untamed nature of the ancient world and mythology offers a creative force which can overturn the repressive structures of power and adulthood.

Fantastic Beasts and Just-So Stories

The book *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* is presented as a facsimile of Harry Potter's copy of his school textbook and features a brief foreword from Albus Dumbledore; various graffiti by Harry, Ron, and Hermione; a fairly substantial introduction by Newt Scamander; a list of sixty-three magical beasts, classified by danger level, with information about origin, habitat, habits, magical qualities; it finishes with a brief life of the "author". Of the sixty-three beasts, thirteen are Greek, or are ascribed a Greek origin, or have a significantly Greek element;¹² eleven are from folklore of the British Isles (including Ireland),¹³ one is Japanese (kappa), one Tibetan (yeti), one (nundu) seems to derive from African folklore. The remaining thirty-four do not seem to have obvious origins in existing folk culture.

It is not always easy to classify fantastic beasts as Greek or non-Greek. For instance, Rowling ascribes the phoenix to ancient Egypt, but in doing this she is very much following Herodotus 2.73 (cf. below, page 457). The salamander is an interesting case: it is a real animal, to which Rowling ascribes magical properties ("feeds on flame", "Salamander blood has powerful curative and restorative properties", 2018, 79). In this she seems to be reversing a tradition told by Pliny in *Naturalis Historia* 29.23, in which the salamander is highly poisonous and can

¹² Those which are (arguably) of Greek or Roman origin include: basilisk, centaur, chimaera, dragon(?), griffin, hippocampus, hippogriff(?), manticore, merpeople(?), phoenix, salamander, sphinx, werewolf(?), winged horse.

¹³ Those with a significant British tradition include: fairies, ghouls, gnomes, grindylow, imp, kelpie, leprechaun, pixie, sea serpent (Loch Ness monster), troll, unicorn. The porlock may refer to the beast of Exmoor, but this seems much less self-evident.

magically prevent fires.¹⁴ Dragons do derive from the Greek word δράκων (drakon) but are quintessential parts of medieval culture (although the huge serpent/dragon guarding the Golden Fleece seems much like its later mythical counterparts).¹⁵ Rowling's dragons come from all over the world, including China, Eastern Europe, Scandinavia, and Wales. Winged horses also come in several varieties, one of which certainly has a Greek link: the Aethonan, or chestnut, derives from the name Αἰθών (Aethon), meaning 'fiery', the name of a horse variously owned by Hector (Homer, *Iliad* 8.164), Pallas (Virgil, *Aeneid* 11.89), and Helios (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 2.153).

The sphinx is located by Rowling as Egyptian, but associated with riddles, following the Sphinx of the Oedipus myth in the *Fantastic Beasts A–Z* entry ("delights in puzzles and riddles", 2018, 82). In the introduction, the sphinx is discussed as a creature that could technically be classified as a being, not a beast: "The sphinx talks only in puzzles and riddles, and is violent when given the wrong answer" (xxiv). Although Rowling is careful not to mention the gender of the sphinx (Egyptian sphinxes are male, the Greek Sphinx is female), and its association with guarding temples is more Egyptian, it should be classified as at least half Greek. The fiction is that this guide gives you the reality behind the mythical beasts, which are mythical because of their magical nature. The merpeople are explicitly said by Scamander to take their origin from the Greek Sirens, which is, as discussed elsewhere in this volume,¹⁶ not an unusual connection.

The entry on the Chimaera alludes to the Bellerophon myth and reinterprets his fall to the Earth from Pegasus after the horse was stung by a gadfly, which seems to occur first in Pindar (*Isthmian Ode* 7.44; cf. Schol. *ad Pind. Ol.* 13.130; see also Horace *Ode* 4.11.26): "There is only one known instance of the successful slaying of a Chimaera and the unlucky wizard concerned fell to his death from his winged horse" (Rowling 2018, 14). Rowling offers a banalization of mythology, in which magic domesticates mythical beasts.

¹⁴ "[T]he salamander can kill whole tribes unawares. For if it has crawled into a tree, it infects with its venom all the fruit, killing like aconite by its freezing property those who have eaten of it. [...] As to the power to protect against fires, which the Magi attribute to the animal, since according to them no other can put fire out, could the salamander really do so, Rome by trial would have already found out. Sextius tells us that as food the salamander, preserved in honey after entrails, feet, and head have been cut away, is aphrodisiac, but he denies its power to put fire out", trans. W. H. S. Jones in Pliny (1963, 233).

¹⁵ On ancient dragons, cf. Ogden (2013).

¹⁶ Cf. the chapters by Weronika Kostecka and Maciej Skowera, "Womanhood and/as Monstrosity: Cultural and Individual Biography of the «Beast» in Anna Czerwińska-Rydel's *Baltycka syrena* [The Baltic Siren]", and Katarzyna Jerzak, "Remnants of Myth, Vestiges of Tragedy: Peter Pan in the Mermaids' Lagoon", in this volume (247–265 and 267–280).

Werewolves are also arguably classical in origin.¹⁷ So despite the sense that the world of Harry Potter is fundamentally grounded in UK daily life and UK children's literature, and the aspirations of Newt Scamander, world traveller, aim at global comprehensiveness, in practice the largest group of beasts comes from Greek mythology.

There are further connections in the names of the magical beasts: the hippogriff has a name which is formed partly by analogy with "hippopotamus" or "hippocampus", the latter another genuine Greek mythological beast. The hippogriff, however, seems to have been invented by Ludovico Ariosto in the *Orlando furioso*, although Rowling probably came across it in Bulfinch's *Mythology* (cf. Jossa 2016). Interestingly, it is possible that Ariosto himself was drawing on Lucian's *Vera historia* 1.11, which mentions the "Hippogypioi", men riding vultures,¹⁸ who appear on the moon, where Ariosto's Astolfo is taken in canto 34 of *Orlando furioso*.

Another play on words is evident in the name "Erumpent" which refers to a rhinoceros-like creature with an exploding horn, from the Latin "e-rumpo" ('burst out'), or in the name the "Malaclaw", like a lobster but evil: "[...] its flesh is unfit for human consumption and will result in a high fever and an unsightly green rash. [...] The Malaclaw's bite has the unusual side effect of making the victim highly unlucky for a period of up to a week after the injury" (Rowling 2018, 58).

More complex is the "Lethifold" (52–57), a malicious animate blanket that suffocates and eats its victims like a boa constrictor, after causing them to forget who they are. Here Rowling combines the Lotus-eaters of the *Odyssey* with the river Lethe of the Underworld, while hinting at a depression that makes people unable to get out of bed. This classical connection is underlined by the names of the humans involved in the story Newt Scamander tells: Flavius Belby, who bravely survives a Lethifold attack, like a good Flavian explorer, and Janus Thickey who faked his own death in 1973 to move in with the landlady of the Green Dragon five miles away (appropriately two-faced – and starting life again). Newt Scamander himself is given the full name of Newton Artemis Fido Scamander: it is hard to fully unpack the implications of this name. "Newton"

¹⁷ Ancient references to werewolves: Herodotus 4.105; Virgil, *Eclogues* 8.95–100; Petronius, *Satyricon* 62; Pliny, *NH* 8.34.80–83. On werewolves in literature, cf. Scoduto (2008).

¹⁸ "We determined to go still further inland, but we met what they call the Vulture Dragoons [τοῖς Ἰππογύπιοις], and were arrested. These are men riding on large vultures and using the birds for horses. The vultures are large and for the most part have three heads: you can judge of their size from the fact that the mast of a large merchantman is not so long or so thick as the smallest of the quills they have. The Vulture Dragoons are commissioned to fly about the country and bring before the king any stranger they may find, so of course they arrested us and brought us before him", trans. A. M. Harmon in Lucian (1913, 259–261).

clearly suggests his identity as a scientist (Isaac Newton), while the diminutive Newt suggests a “geekish” concern with unattractive animals, as in Gussie Fink-Nottle of P. G. Wodehouse’s *Right Ho, Jeeves* (1934). “Artemis” links him with Greek mythology, and the idea of the hunter and hunting. “Fido” is the comic name of a typically faithful dog, suggesting both his ability to track animals down and his faithfulness (via the Latin “fides”). “Scamander” refers to one of the major rivers of Homer’s Troy, which perhaps suggests a certain exotic otherworldliness, while also including the word “scam”, perhaps linking him to the tradition of the trickster hero, of which Odysseus is a prototypical example.

Similarly the Quintaped (Rowling 2018, 73–75), formed by analogy with quadruped, is derived from the character Quintus MacBoon after a magical feud which involved the transfiguring of an entire clan, who then killed all the opposing family who had transfigured them and resisted all attempts to change them back. As often, this story undermines the hierarchy between animals and humans (and alludes to Lewis’ Dufflepuds in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 1952, but without the class-related condescension). This story shows Rowling’s interest in aetiology in *Fantastic Beasts*. She frequently plays on the differing levels of knowledge between Muggles and wizards to explain everyday problems and phobias through invented magical animals: the chizpurfle, for instance, like a gremlin, causes electrical faults in muggle appliances; the diricawl is the real name of the dodo, which is not actually extinct, but just prone to disappearing at will, so no Muggles have seen it. This latter shows the essentially consoling nature of fantasy. Fairies, on the other hand, are much less attractive in reality than in Muggle literature, apparently. The mooncalf performs strange ritual dances that result in odd formations in corn fields (perhaps a joke aimed both at the people who ascribe crop circles to aliens, and rural teenagers who could be imagined as actually creating them). Murtlaps nibble on the feet of people bathing in the sea. In this respect, Rowling’s catalogue is strangely Hellenistic in flavour.

The Basilisk and Phoenix: Monstrosity and Reversal

This section presents a case study of two mythical beasts in action: the basilisk and the phoenix at the end of *Chamber of Secrets*. This narrative sequence is significant because it foreshadows a number of thematically important developments later in the Harry Potter story: the diary is the first horcrux into which Voldemort splits off his soul; later Harry will use basilisks’ teeth to destroy horcruxes. As Tom Riddle shows us the development of Voldemort, so he also reveals the complexity of the relationship between Voldemort and Harry. Tom is his imperfect double, and Harry’s ability with Parseltongue shows his connection with Voldemort. Relationships with mythical beasts define character and have far reaching moral and narrative implications. Dumbledore’s emphasis on Harry’s identity as a true Gryffindor, on the importance of choices over abilities,

foreshadows the conversation they will have in the King's Cross of Harry's mind. The imperfect anagram of Tom Marvolo Riddle as "I am Lord Voldemort" plays on the theme of imperfect revelation: Voldemort himself does not fully understand his own nature, let alone the magic that he uses. The monstrosity of the basilisk is associated with Voldemort while the otherworldly authority of the phoenix characterizes Dumbledore. Yet mythical beasts have the potential to undermine the duality of Harry Potter, as we saw with the example of the centaurs earlier in this chapter. The close connection between Harry and Voldemort is partly brought out by their shared connection to snakes. Sirius' ability to turn into a dog and the fact that Lupin is a werewolf – two threads introduced in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999) – show Rowling's tendency to play with audience expectations about beasts and monsters.

The description of the phoenix in *Fantastic Beasts* draws on that in Herodotus:

Another bird also is sacred; it is called the phoenix. I myself have never seen it, but only pictures of it; for the bird comes but seldom into Egypt, once in five hundred years, as the people of Heliopolis say. It is said that the phoenix comes when his father dies. If the picture truly shows his size and appearance, his plumage is partly golden but mostly red. He is most like an eagle in shape and bigness. The Egyptians tell a tale of this bird's devices which I do not believe. He comes, they say, from Arabia bringing his father to the Sun's temple enclosed in myrrh, and there buries him. His manner of bringing is this: first he moulds an egg of myrrh as heavy as he can carry, and when he has proved its weight by lifting it he then hollows out the egg and puts his father in it, covering over with more myrrh the hollow in which the body lies; so the egg being with his father in it of the same weight as before, the phoenix, after enclosing him, carries him to the temple of the Sun in Egypt. Such is the tale of what is done by this bird. (*Histories* 2.73)¹⁹

The basilisk is interestingly less canonical: I wonder whether Rowling might have originally been tempted to use Medusa? But perhaps a wholly animal beast is a safer bearer of monstrosity than one that is partly human (when Rick Riordan uses Medusa she reveals potential misogyny). Pliny describes the basilisk as having the power to kill with its eyes, a crown-shaped mark on its head, and extremely venomous poison that has been known to kill a man on horseback

¹⁹ Trans. A. D. Godley in Herodotus (1920, 361).

who stabbed it with a spear, and the horse as well.²⁰ Rowling describes the basilisk in *The Chamber of Secrets* as “curious and deadly”, emphasizes its enormous size and life-span, “deadly and venomous fangs”, and “murderous stare”, the enmity of spiders and its potential destruction by the crowing of a rooster.²¹ Her basilisk differs from the ancient (and medieval) traditions in a number of ways: size, age, the connection with roosters (hatched from a chicken’s egg – this suggests the cockatrice, with which it was often confused in the later tradition). It is possible that Rowling had at one point intended that the basilisk should be somewhat smaller, since it travels around Hogwarts in the water pipe system (apparently): hence the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets itself in Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom. The extremity of its venom and the power of its gaze, though, are ancient features.

In Pliny the basilisk seems to kill by looking at you: contagion is a feature of its venom, as well as its gaze. In Rowling, its victims die if they meet its gaze (and in this it seems to be more like the ancient Medusa). If they see it indirectly (in a mirror, a reflection, through a camera, through a ghost) they are merely petrified (increasing the connection with Medusa, but intensifying the power). Like Medusa, the basilisk is used to kill others as a tool (although unlike Medusa it cannot still be used when dead, or blinded). Tom Riddle, a ghost remaining in the diary of his sixteen-year-old self, directs first Ginny Weasley, then the basilisk to bring about a confrontation with Harry Potter, who he knows his adult self would want to kill, himself used as a tool by Lucius Malfoy, either to discredit

²⁰ Cf. Pliny *NH* 8.33 on the basilisk: “The basilisk serpent also has the same power. It is a native of the province of Cyrenaica, not more than 12 inches long, and adorned with a bright white marking on the head like a sort of diadem. It routs all snakes with its hiss, and does not move its body forward in manifold coils like the other snakes but advancing with its middle raised high. It kills bushes not only by its touch but also by its breath, scorches up grass and bursts rocks. Its effect on other animals is disastrous: it is believed that once one was killed with a spear by a man on horseback and the infection rising through the spear killed not only the rider but also the horse. Yet to a creature so marvellous as this – indeed kings have often wished to see a specimen when safely dead – the venom of weasels is fatal: so fixed is the decree of nature that nothing shall be without its match. They throw the basilisks into weasels’ holes, which are easily known by the foulness of the ground, and the weasels kill them by their stench and die themselves at the same time, and nature’s battle is accomplished”, trans. Harris Rackham in Pliny (1940, 57–59).

²¹ “Of the many fearsome beasts and monsters that roam our land, there is none more curious or more deadly than the Basilisk, known also as the King of Serpents. This snake which may reach gigantic size and live many hundreds of years, is born from a chicken’s egg hatched beneath a toad. Its methods of killing are most wondrous, for aside from its deadly and venomous fangs, the Basilisk has a murderous stare, and all who are fixed with the beam of its eye shall suffer instant death. Spiders flee before the Basilisk, for it is their mortal enemy, and the Basilisk flees only from the crowing of the rooster, which is fatal to it” (Rowling 1998, 215).

Arthur Weasley's Muggle Protection Act, or manipulated by Voldemort already to kill Harry. The plays on knowledge and power in *Chamber of Secrets* fit closely with the visual nature of the basilisk's threat. Both Voldemort and more strikingly Dumbledore can be argued to participate in something like the divine gaze of ancient epic, with, among other things, the ability to know things that should only be available to the narrator.²² So Harry tells his story but Dumbledore already knows it and can extract him from the embarrassing situation of having to tell tales on Ginny. Later in the books when Dumbledore stumbles (not apparently knowing about the failure of Harry's occlumency lessons with Snape), he is like the god momentarily distracted by events elsewhere. He is of course mortal, as is Voldemort, but the obsession with mortality and memory is appropriately epic, as is the desire to rewrite and control history and society. The storyline of the Harry Potter novels uses both the monstrosity and the magnitude of narrative motifs inherited from ancient epic to create a more impressive grandeur and scale of battle: mythical beasts contribute to this sublimity, set in opposition to the quasi-divine powers of wizards.

Snakes are viewed in a wholly negative light in Harry Potter, while ancient attitudes were more complex.²³ Salazar Slytherin speaks snake, as does Voldemort, and by extension Harry; Voldemort later has the monstrous serpent Nagini as familiar and horcrux; Rowling's basilisk is an incarnation of evil. In the ancient world snakes could be guardians (of the Golden Fleece), geniuses (of Anchises in Virgil's *Aeneid* book 5), as well as destructive and terrifying (snakes and snake imagery in Virgil's *Aeneid* book 2).²⁴ Medea in Valerius Flaccus weeps for her snake (although she is, of course, a witch).²⁵ Rowling's phoenix is also rather idiosyncratic: phoenixes are not normally companion animals, and *Fantastic Beasts* emphasizes the difficulties of taming them, to bring out the extraordinary relationship between Fawkes and Dumbledore.²⁶ The introduction of the phoenix as the antagonist to the basilisk may result from the fact that Rowling's basilisk can be killed by a rooster's cry.

²² On the divine and mortal gaze in ancient epic, see Lovatt (2013, 29–121).

²³ Cf. Ogden (2013) on dragons and gazing.

²⁴ Guardian of the Golden Fleece: Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 4.92–211; snake as symbolic representation of the genius of Anchises: Virgil, *Aeneid* 5.84–99, with Panoussi (2009, 163–164); Trojan Laocoon is destroyed by two snakes sent by Minerva: Virgil, *Aeneid* 2.199–227; on snake imagery in the *Aeneid* book 2 see still the classic Knox (1950).

²⁵ Cf. snake episode in Valerius Flaccus, *Argonautica* 8.54–133.

²⁶ The Harry Potter Wiki calculates that Dumbledore and Fawkes must have been together for at least 58 years, since Dumbledore knows that the tail feathers of Fawkes were used to create the matched wands of Voldemort and Harry, according to Ollivander, in or before 1938. But Ollivander could simply have passed the information on to Dumbledore (although it might be hard to extract tail feathers from a wild phoenix); see The Harry Potter Wiki [n.d.], s.v. "Fawkes".

The battle between basilisk and phoenix at the climax of *Chamber of Secrets* pits two Greek mythological creatures against each other: monster versus magical helper, Voldemort's avatar versus Dumbledore's faithful comrade. Each is represented as old and powerful, but while the basilisk's power is obvious in its size, Fawkes and the Sorting Hat seem initially unhelpful. Harry Potter himself is like a Perseus figure, afforded a magical helper through his loyalty to the higher power of Dumbledore, even if it is McGonagall who is named after Minerva. Even though Harry himself delivers the killing blow to both basilisk and diary, his agency is limited: the snake impales itself on the sword, which has miraculously appeared, and he unthinkingly stabs the diary (although he acts with more intentionality in the film version). In this way (in the book at least), he resembles Diomedes in the *Iliad*, who stabs Ares when Athena literally pushes his hand to do it.²⁷

Harry has been manipulated by Riddle just as Ginny has, led on by his desire for knowledge and his desire to be a hero, when he himself was the true prize of the quest. The battle between basilisk and phoenix, which Harry watches in shadow play on the wall in the film, is a battle of the gaze. First the phoenix blinds the beast, depriving it of its most devastating power, and then saves Harry from his apparently fatal wound. We might also see an analogy between the blinded basilisk and the Cyclops: in order to escape from the cave Harry uses the tail of the phoenix, perhaps evoking Odysseus' less than dignified escape from the cave of the Cyclops, clinging to the underbelly of Polyphemus' ram. Harry, like Odysseus, was lured into the cave at least partly by his desire for heroic recognition. The basilisk, however, bears a stronger resemblance to the dragon which traditionally guards the Golden Fleece, especially the Hydra of Ray Harryhausen's *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963).²⁸

The dualism in the battle between the basilisk and the phoenix is mirrored by the dualism of Harry versus young Tom Riddle. But this opposition is deconstructed by the fact that Harry has affinities with both basilisk and phoenix, both Riddle and Dumbledore. The doubleness of Harry's identity is brought out by his encounter with Riddle and emblemized by his connection with both the basilisk (which he understands) and the phoenix (which he inadvertently calls to him). Dumbledore in the final chapter emphasizes that identity is a choice, and Harry has chosen Gryffindor, which the Sorting Hat confirms by producing the sword of Godric Gryffindor. The whole sequence forms a katabasis and arguably an initiation (each book takes Harry a stage closer to the final katabasis in King's

²⁷ In the film of *The Chamber of Secrets*, Harry is given more agency by evading the blind basilisk for a time, and climbing up to the heights of Slytherin's statue to gain his own semi-divine perspective. In the battle between Jason and Ray Harryhausen's Hydra (Chaffey 1963), Jason also jumps up the cliffs to gain an advantage, although this is a common motif in fights with monsters. Jason also impales the Hydra on his sword, now from beneath, in a position of terror, about to die.

²⁸ Cf. the note above.

Cross, and to his own willing self-sacrifice, which arguably functions as a sort of apotheosis). The ascent of Harry, Ron, Ginny, and Lockhart, holding onto the magical tail-feathers of the phoenix lends a surreal and abrupt tone to the end of the katabasis, as with Aeneas' return through the gate of false dreams from the Underworld of *Aeneid* book 6.

Beasts are not then reduced to a dichotomy between wild and wise: the basilisk personifies Voldemort's evil, but only comes if it is called. It is under the direction of human agency. Fawkes is a representative of Dumbledore, a symbol of resurrection who will himself die and be regenerated in the *Order of the Phoenix*. His wisdom does not involve language, while the existence of Parseltongue emphasizes the intelligence of serpents. Throughout *Fantastic Beasts* Rowling problematizes the distinction between animals and humans: centaurs and merpeople refuse the invitation to take part in wizard society, while trolls and giants are incapable of interacting socially. The figure of Hagrid, himself a hybrid between human and giant, accretes problematic animals: Fluffy the three-headed hell-hound, who can be tamed by any "wannabe" Orpheus; Aragog, enormous, knowledgeable and hideous, who has helped Harry and Ron figure out the mystery of the basilisk; Buckbeak the Hippogriff, who must be rescued before he is put down; Norbert the Norwegian Ridgeback; finally Grawp, the giant, Hagrid's half brother. Similarly, house-elves, goblins, and werewolves²⁹ are all treated as oppressed minorities, not unlike adolescents in their subversion of adult expectations. The basilisk adds a layer of complication, terror, and physicality to the secret of *The Chamber of Secrets*: by working through first Ginny, then the basilisk, Riddle underlines the horror of not knowing.

Rowling complicates traditional story structures in many ways: Harry is not straightforwardly the hero nor Ginny the damsel in distress. Through repeated reversals, Rowling overturns audience expectations. Ginny has in fact been the monster, although possessed by the diary; she is only revealed as the bait at the end of the encounter. We are not yet aware that she will be Harry's long-term love interest. Similarly in *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, the hero on the flying horse does not rescue the damsel in distress: instead the damsel rescues the flying horse, and uses it to evacuate the alleged villain. Comparison with classical models and mythical archetypes brings out the originality of Harry Potter. It is Ginny's unrequited admiration for Harry that drove her to confide in the diary in the first place, so Harry, or his fame, in a sense caused the entire sequence of events (although we can comfortably blame Lucius Malfoy at the very end). The image of the diary as a dangerous zone of contact and contagion intertwines the school story with the mythical and the heroic: the book itself and the act of writing can be problematic and destructive. Perhaps Graeme Whiting is right after

²⁹ The werewolves were the topic of a talk by Maria Handrejk during the conference *Chasing Mythical Beasts...* (cf. the conference booklet by Marciniak and Olechowska 2016).

all: Rowling reveals a profound distrust of books and writers, further brought out by the figure of Gilderoy Lockhart (who, like a certain stereotype of the media don, is more interested in signing books than writing them). He has plagiarized his own adventures, leaving a trail of forgetful and forgotten heroes behind him. The emptiness of his heroism is made literal by the loss of his memory (just as Umbridge will lose her memory after the trauma of the centaurs). Lockhart and Harry between them undo epic memorialization, which Rowling herself only quietly recuperates in the privacy of Dumbledore's study. The blinding of the basilisk leads to its death, and the basilisk's tooth destroys diary and memory, so that powerful gaze and heroic memory are intimately connected. Similarly, Odysseus achieves his escape from the Cyclops by denying his heroic name, and destroys his crew by reclaiming it.

Fantastic Beasts: The Screenplay

The film starring Eddie Redmayne as Newt Scamander was released in November 2016, directed by David Yates, and its success has led to plans for four more films in the story arc. Rowling wrote the script, which is published as *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them: The Original Screenplay* (2016). The main beasts featured are Rowling's inventions: the niffler, a mole-like creature with a strong attraction to shiny and valuable objects; the occamy, a blue snake-like bird that takes up the space available to it; the bowtruckle, a cross between stick insect and plant; the obscurus, a vast dark force created by the suppression of a child's magical powers; the murtlap, which bites Jacob Kowalski; the billywig, sapphire blue insect; an erumpent, explosive rhinoceros; and a demiguise called Dougal. Inside Newt Scamander's case the characters encounter a Swooping Evil, reptilian bird-like form that grows suddenly from a cocoon when released; Frank the Thunderbird, bird that causes thunder and can erase memories; graphorns, sabre-toothed tiger with slimy tentacles; a fwooper, small pink bird; mooncalves, doxys, glowbugs, grindylows, and a diricawl (dodo) with its chicks.

Many of these are already in the *Fantastic Beasts* book; the Swooping Evil and thunderbird have been invented for the film. None of them are Greek in origin: in fact, none of them are traditional in origin. While the Harry Potter novels and films connected with audiences by re-using creatures with which they were familiar from elsewhere, the film of *Fantastic Beasts* thrives on novelty and obscurity. Newt's achievement is to find and tame little-known and badly understood creatures, an image for the richness of animal life on the planet. The beasts remain marvellous but clearly outside normal mythology, beyond the realms of the comfortably exotic Greek and Roman creatures. Rowling needed to go a step further to make her creations appeal more to a world-wide market, especially the US, and has left behind the need for a classical education. In a similar way, the remake of *Clash of the Titans* (2010, dir. Louis Leterrier) blended the classical

mythology of Harryhausen's original (1981, dir. Desmond Davis) with Near-Eastern and invented beasts.

In what follows, I address two main questions: what is the significance of the beasts in *Fantastic Beasts*? Why turn a bestiary into a narrative? The film of *Fantastic Beasts* falls into two parts: the narrative about recapturing the escaped beasts from Newt's magic suitcase-cum-zoo, set in opposition to the detection and elimination of the obscurus. The two halves of the story do not straightforwardly connect to each other: Newt's striving to clear his name accidentally brings him and his friends into contact with the obscurus.

Beasts and Beings

In *Fantastic Beasts* both book and film, Rowling reflects on the complex and problematic relationship between beasts, magical and otherwise, and the human animal. In Lewis' Narnia stories, without doubt an important influence on Rowling, there is a strong distinction drawn between the talking animals of Narnia and the dumb animals of Calormene and our world.³⁰ *The Horse and His Boy* (1954) is built around a talking horse's desire to escape from Calormene and his protective partnership with the boy. In *Prince Caspian* (1951) there are few talking animals left, hiding on the fringes of the usurped Narnia, which can be argued to represent the persistence of mythology on the margins of society.³¹ In *The Last Battle* (1956) animals aligned against the moral order of Aslan are punished by removing their sentience. Edith Hall has well discussed the problematic assumption that talking animals are suitable for children, and it is notable that the majority of Rowling's magical beasts do not talk (none at all in the film of *Fantastic Beasts*).³²

Scamander begins his introduction with a section on "What Is a Beast?", which Harry's graffiti (in the 2001 edition) answers with "a big hairy thing with too many legs" (Rowling 2018, xvii). Scamander then outlines the history of the wizarding community's attempts to decide which creatures should be allowed to participate in wizarding society.³³ The first definition of "walking on two legs" did not account for centaurs and merpeople; "the ability to communicate in human language" caused other problems; finally, wizarding society settled on "sufficient intelligence to understand and participate in making laws": these were

³⁰ On Narnia cf. the chapter by Simon Burton, "A Narnian «Allegory of Love»: The Pegasus in C. S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*" in this volume, p. XXX.

³¹ In Lewis' novels there is a strong association between classical mythology and the magic of Narnia, cf. n. 9.

³² On talking animals and Aesop cf. Hall (2016); on Aesop as world literature cf. also Hall (2018).

³³ The word 'creature', as in the Hogwarts course "Care of Magical Creatures", covers both beasts and beings.

the criteria used to distinguish between beasts and beings. In the present day of Scamander's wizarding world, there remain anomalies: werewolves have "Support Services" in the Beings Division, and "Werewolf Registry" and "Capture Unit" in the Beasts Division. Centaurs and merpeople were invited to join the wizarding community but declined to do so out of horror at other beings who were included (hags and vampires).

Treatment of magical beasts is a moral marker in the Harry Potter novels and the script for the *Fantastic Beasts* film: those who want to execute Buckbeak the Hippogriff in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* are inhuman and morally despicable; werewolves are treated with sympathy (the character Lupin in particular, although Fenrir Greyback is a counterexample); Hagrid in his predilection for dangerous beasts is both outrageous and admirable. Newt Scamander takes this positive attitude to magical beasts further still when he announces: "I need to find everyone who's escaped, before they get hurt. [...] they're currently in alien terrain surrounded by millions of the most vicious creatures on the planet. [A beat.] Humans" (scene 47, Kindle edition). First he calls the beasts "everyone", showing that he considers all of them, no matter how linguistically backwards, to be people. Then he contrasts them negatively with humans. Scamander's aim is to "rescue, nurture, and protect", and "educate" his fellow wizards about animals. This strong environmental message turns his portable zoo in a briefcase into a Noah's Ark, preserving species for the future. Equally his creatures function to protect, release, and aid him in his adventures: as much as they get him into trouble, they also get him out of trouble. In a sense, the Ark is also an Argo and his fellow travellers are heroes of the magical beast world, each with their individual powers.

The beasts who play a major part in the film are the niffler, the demiguise, the occamy, the erumpent, the Swooping Evil, the bowtruckle, the thunderbird, and the obscurus. All in their different ways push the boundary of beast/being/monster. The niffler is attracted to shiny objects and shows immense resourcefulness and mischief in acquiring them, essentially forming Newt's antagonist for the first section of the film. The demiguise is able to be invisible and plays entertainingly with artefacts of New York, especially in Macy's department store, like an errant child, but eventually turns out to be protecting the occamy, with its ability to fill the space available. The occamy is presented in such a way that when it escapes it seems like a fearsome and enormous monster, that fills the room and destroys it, but after it is captured by luring it into a teapot, it is literally cut down to size and redefined as a fragile and endangered creature. The erumpent is initially glimpsed as a threatening glow under the ice of Central Park, but is anthropomorphized as a symbol of the terrors of female desire: she is attracted by musk and pursues Jacob Kowalski, nearly flattening him with her huge rhinoceros-like bulk. The Swooping Evil, despite its name, is a very helpful creature who seems primarily to exist in order to act as a weapon and protection for Newt. It acts more like a tool or the superior technological

weapon of a spy or comic book hero, than a person. Newt gives its name as a translation of the “native” description, with a clear sense that he does not think it appropriate. The bowtruckle, called Pickett, is the most anthropomorphized of all: he lives in Newt’s pocket, intervenes in the narrative by picking locks and features in a touching scene where Newt is forced to swap him for information. The thunderbird, who also has a name (Frank), is the reason for Newt travelling to America, has been maltreated and rescued, and provides plot resolution by obliterating the general population with a drugged rain, like an incongruous *deus ex machina*.

The obscurus is most interesting of all, since it operates across all three categories of beast, being, and monster. We first encounter one inside the briefcase-zoo, where Jacob is attracted towards it, but Newt warns him off. Newt claims that this force can cause no harm on its own, but his reaction to Jacob’s approach towards it suggests that he is dissimulating. It is produced by a child who has suppressed their magical powers, but clearly can survive on its own, since Newt’s one was removed from a child who had died. The dark force causing death and destruction in New York, which murders the press baron’s son, is an obscurus, but we are encouraged to see this as a specific act of vengeance chosen by the obscurial (child producing it). The obscurus is more like a spell than an animal, but does not operate straightforwardly at the instigation of the obscurial. It rather forms a manifestation of powerful negative emotions. Viewers are encouraged to pity the obscurial, alongside Newt and Tina – both pity and fear the obscurus, and at the end of the film a small shred of the defeated obscurus escapes, which Newt watches with pleasure.

Fantastic beasts, then, can be endearing pets or terrifying monsters, sometimes both. Harry’s interpretation of the word “beast” suggests that there is always an element of outlandishness and monstrosity. It is notable that the obscurus does not have an entry in Newt Scamander’s textbook, but is rather the name of the publishing house which releases the book. It is of course Latin, associating the classical world with darkness, power, oppression, and negative emotions. The close links between Latin teaching and brutal didactic regimes in school stories may underlie this connection, as well as the use of Latin as a language of power elsewhere in the books and in representations of wizarding.³⁴ Endearing pets have English names (niffler, bowtruckle) while monsters are more likely to be associated with ancient mythology and culture.

Conclusions

While Greek and Roman mythological beasts were moderately important in the slim bestiary that is the published book version of *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, they have entirely disappeared by the time we reach the 2016 movie

³⁴ On Harry Potter and Latin, see Casta (2014); Hodkinson and Lovatt (2018).

of the same name. From the Harry Potter novels (some) beasts along with (some) names are the only classical material that survive the drastic editing required to turn five hundred pages of fiction into two hours of film. Two movements can be seen. First, the more nuanced and detailed descriptions in the novel form are more suited to allusions to mythologies past, while the films undoubtedly aim at a broader and more international audience than the books. Second, J. K. Rowling has grown in independence and self-reliance as she has moved on in her career. While the books, and particularly the early ones, have many references to existing mythologies, the world of *Fantastic Beasts* (2016) is focused on Rowling's own inventions.

What do these Harry Potter productions tell us about the mythical beasts themselves? The mythical beasts of Harry Potter are not just monstrous: they can be human-like, elemental, or almost divine. They create problems for straightforward categories of animal, human, and god, with superhuman, magical abilities, understanding, humour, and emotions. The first *Fantastic Beasts* film retains the affinity to bestiaries at the heart of the book, by introducing us to a number of beasts, each one with its own heroic abilities or powers, while the monster that dominates the dark side of the plot is generated by human pain. The mythical beasts of *Fantastic Beasts* and the Harry Potter sequence create a sense of epic sublimity, not just as antagonists, or obstacles, but as opportunities to display morality, courage, and humanity, and as problems that demand interpretation. Ultimately, along with wizards and magic, Harry Potter's mythical beasts invite us to chase the question of what it is to be human.

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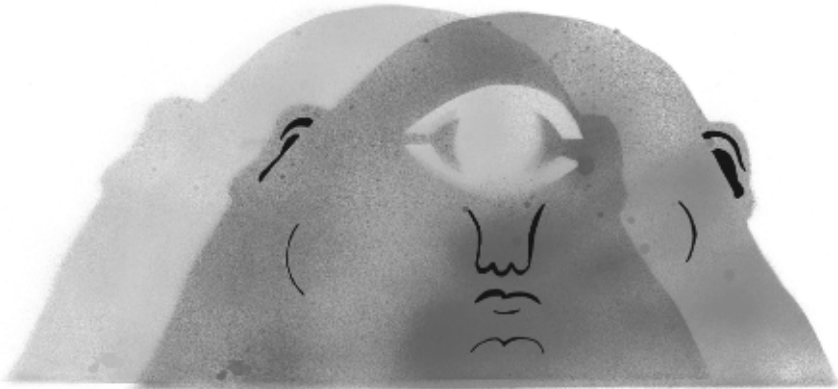
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PART 5

AND THE CHASE GOES ON: THE MONSTERS OF VISUAL CULTURE



Maja Abgarowicz, *The Cyclops* (2012).
Illustration created at the Workshop of Prof. Zygmunt Januszewski,
Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw.

New Mythological Hybrids Are Born in *Bande Dessinée*: Greek Myths as Seen by Joann Sfar and Christophe Blain

Classical Antiquity has been present in the French comic-book universe since 1948, over a decade before it was truly conquered by Goscinny and Uderzo's hero *Astérix le Gaulois* in 1959. While Asterix and company, strong in their sense of Gallic heritage, have been poking gentle fun at contemporary French society for over five decades, the twenty-first-century newcomers Joann Sfar (b. 1971) and Christophe Blain (b. 1970) have reached further back to Greek Antiquity, taking a gloves-off approach to its mythological aspect and laughing at the Olympic gods and their entangled progeny. In their 2002–2009 trilogy, they created quite a few hybrid creatures, chief among them Socrates the half-dog, son of Zeus' dog and companion to the illiterate Hercules. This Hercules is a figure bursting with testosterone who is soon joined by equally preposterous versions of Odysseus and Oedipus. This unusual use of mythology in modern comic books, while undoubtedly achieving its goal of making readers laugh and reflect, definitely merits a serious exploration by reception scholars.

Preliminary Remarks

First, a few remarks of a general nature. When we begin exploring the ins and outs of the reception of Graeco-Roman Antiquity from a comparative, international perspective, we rapidly become aware of two guiding principles, glaringly obvious but worth spelling out:

1. Reception of Antiquity varies from culture to culture, from nation to nation, and this diversity grows in parallel with geographical distance from Greece and Rome. Some of the works resulting from reception flourish only at home, others travel well and occasionally reach the rank of global success interacting with foreign cultural texts.
2. The spectrum of cases collected in this catch-all concept and universal literary technique is huge, the continuum of reception long and diverse: from translation to adaptation, to parody, inspiration, ideological revision, contemporary vision, quotation, allusion, more or less original, conscious or not, on the level of narration, characters, ideas, as well as intention, motivation, and aims – all that de-

fined and framed by the period in which each case originates. The complexity grows even further when we consider that reception may involve a change of medium from literature to almost anything, a change of means of expression, and a change of language, to say nothing about modes of engaging the audiences, whether telling, showing, or interacting,¹ or a mix of any or all of them.

Why a French Comic Book?

My choice of topic was guided by these two principles, combined with another consideration urgent in view of the national make-up of the *Chasing Mythical Beasts* research team that created a certain risk of under-representing French culture. France is after all not only a cluster of former Roman provinces but also home to the French language considered to be Latin in its historical development. In other words, France is a country high on the affinity-to-Antiquity scale, right after Italy and Greece. The Roman legacy is firmly entrenched in contemporary French literature for school children, both in textbooks and in fiction, yet the less direct Greek heritage, especially its mythology, remains just as present and vibrant. To select a truly successful, promising genre, I turned for advice to the market, the obvious indicator of current popularity.

In 2015 the best sales (an increase of more than 10%) were recorded by the triple market of *bande dessinée*, manga, and comics which accounts for about one third of book sales in France (Sutton 2016a).² Among the French children's books in this category that travelled most successfully into other cultures, are two comic strips, *Tintin* and *Astérix le Gaulois*. The latter comprises thirty-seven albums published from 1959 to 2015 and authored by René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo (24), Uderzo alone (10), and Jean-Yves Ferri and Didier Conrad (3). Hugely popular in France and abroad, the albums have been translated into one hundred and ten languages and dialects,³ sales figures are well on the road to four hundred million copies, a phenomenon comparable to Harry Potter but one that happened in much slower motion, over half a century or so. The album *Astérix (Le papyrus de César [Asterix and the Missing Scroll])* became a num-

¹ See Linda Hutcheon (2006, 38–52) who reflects on adaptation, a specific variety of the phenomenon of reception, but her reasoning and conclusions apply to the broader concept of reception. On the diversity of classical reception, see for instance Lorna Hardwick (2003, 1–11 et passim).

² The three terms relate to French comic strips, the Japanese manga (often combined with other Asian mangas), and American comic books respectively.

³ Siobhán McElduff in her paper “We’re Not in Gaul Anymore. The Global Translations of *Astérix*” (2016, 143), gives the number of 107 which may be correct, as the number 110 comes from often imprecise publisher’s info. See also McElduff (2016, 143) on *Astérix* and its translations’ sales figures.

ber-one bestseller in 2015 in France with 1,619,000 copies sold.⁴ The album 37, *Astérix et la Transitalique* [Asterix and the Chariot Race] published in mid October 2017, on September 24 placed 76 among the French Amazon bestsellers although it was still three weeks before it became available for purchase. Among comic books for adolescents the title was number one, among comic books of all categories it was number two (Amazon 2017).

Astérix is of course a special case of reception of Classical Antiquity as it is at the same time the reception of early national history, and so the interest of the French audience is natural, basic, and patriotic. The treatment of the subject is satirical and light. While the action is set in the year 50 BC, the books poke fun at French society today and laugh at comic stereotypes of the last century and the current one.

Attractive Beasts and Heroes Inspired by Antiquity in French Comic Books

Casting around for an unusual and intriguing creature, I realized that the only beast of some importance there is a small dog, of “an undefined breed”,⁵ later identified as a West Highland White Terrier.⁶ While there is nothing ancient or classical about it, Idéfix, called in English translation Dogmatix, belongs to a line of animal sidekicks who are canine companions of French comic strip characters, launched by Milou (Snowy), Tintin’s dog friend, judging by appearance also a West Highland White Terrier who actually speaks, but only in one album, *Tintin en Amérique* (1932, colour 1945?).

Idéfix aka Dogmatix – Celtic for sure but hardly mythological – is a clever creature able to share his opinions about his masters (Obélix and Astérix) with the readers. At some point later in the series (album 32: *Astérix et la rentrée gauloise* [Asterix and the Class Act]), he decides to finally say something using

⁴ In second place on the bestseller list was E. L. James’ *Grey: Cinquante Nuances de Grey par Christian* [*Grey: Fifty Shades of Grey through the Eyes of Christian Grey*] with 624,600 copies sold (Sutton 2016b).

⁵ Idéfix is described by Goscinny in the script for the fifth album *Le tour de Gaule d’Astérix* (1965, pre-published in 1963 in the *Pilote*) as “un petit chien de race indéterminée”. The dog gets a name later, in the next volume; the name was the result of a contest among readers.

⁶ Katarzyna Marciniak, the editor of this publication, has reminded me of another animal in the series, Sanglier (Wild Boar) who is present in all thirty-seven albums of *Astérix*, while Idéfix appears for the first time in the fifth album. Even though Sanglier is closer to the idea of a monster than Idéfix, it is highly unlikely that he could have been modelled on the Erymanthian Boar. Sanglier reminds me rather of Pumbaa (to be addressed as Mister Pig) from *The Lion King* (1994) and several other productions of the Disney universe, for whom the comical *singularis porcus* certainly was an inspiration, the difference in species (Pumbaa is in fact a warthog, or *Phacochoerus africanus*) notwithstanding.

actual speech. He is undoubtedly an endearing and brave animal but he does not qualify as a mythologically inspired creature or beast.

There have been of course many other French (or to be precise Franco-Belgian) comic strips inspired by Antiquity (cf., e.g., Aziza 2008 and Gallego 2015). We must mention here the curious case of *Les Aventures d'Alix* by Jacques Martin, a comic book highly popular among French children that features Alix, a contemporary of Astérix and the son of a Gallic chieftain named Astorix (*sic!*), separated from his parents as a child, brought up and adopted by a noble Roman family and mentored by Julius Caesar himself. The first album of *Alix* (the series currently numbers 38 volumes⁷ and is continued by Martin's successors Marco Venanzi et al.) was published in 1948, over a decade before Goscinny and Uderzo launched *Astérix*. Only two titles of the series have been translated into English and a few more into several other European languages. This lack of international exposure probably explains why this strip so beloved by French children has failed to gain a foothold globally. Yet, we may ask why Alix did not charm international publishers like Astérix did – was the failure accidental or did it happen for a reason?

The two heroic Gauls, Alix and Astérix, differ in their attitude and feelings towards Rome in a very significant manner. The latter is a rebel, a resistance fighter, the former a collaborator who serves the occupying force, as enlightened as it may be. Most importantly, Astérix' story and character are amusing, full of light humour and contemporary political allusions; he gets into ridiculous scrapes and is constantly ahead of the Romans, with a Robin Hood-esque flair and flamboyance. Alix is serious, without imagination or panache, a loyal bearer of the official ideology and a useful didactic tool. The series inspired in France a number of spin-offs by the same and even by different authors, the best known being *Les voyages d'Alix* composed of 39 volumes to date and focusing on presenting geography and the history of the ancient world (cf. Helly 2015, 253–263). There are also novels based on the comic book and an animated series in 26 episodes produced for FR3 and later issued on VHS and DVD. Alix remains in fact the only important comic book Gaul who survived Astérix' success, even if he has not travelled beyond French language borders. Scholars have wondered about Astérix' global supremacy over Alix and some, like Claude Aziza (2008, 129–136) and Eran Almagor (2016, 115–116), see it in Goscinny and Uderzo's introduction of multiple perspectives, use of ancient sources and parody, as well

⁷ Volume 36, *Le serment du gladiateur*, was published by Casterman in 2017, with a script by Mathieu Bréda, plates by Marc Jailloux, colour by Corinne Players. Volumes 37 and 38 were published respectively in 2018 (David B., Giorgio Albertini) and 2019 (Mathieu Bréda, Marc Jailloux).

as, in a less traditional drawing style and the specific relation between illustrations and text.⁸

Two years after Alix' author, Jacques Martin, died, in 2012, Thierry Démarez and Valérie Mangin started yet another spin-off under the title *Alix Senator* and began publishing one album a year, the ninth appearing in 2019. The action takes place twenty years after the original series. This work has received some good reviews in France (Tomblaine 2012; Pasamonik 2012; Naeco 2012; Brethes 2017; Bourssens 2017) but has not yet been translated into any foreign language.

Aziza in his *Guide de l'Antiquité imaginaire. Romans, cinéma, bande dessinée* (2008) examines French comic strips in the third part of the book entitled *L'avènement de la bande dessinée* where he groups their themes in successive and often overlapping waves. He calls the most important theme "the heirs to Vercingetorix", and the less patriotic ones "sons of Spartacus" and "Hannibal's avengers". Other main themes include the increasingly fashionable Egyptomania, the Bible (both the Old and the New Testaments), Greek mythology and the later ancient history of Greece, and finally a very important theme related to the heirs of Vercingetorix, ancient Roman history – republican and imperial (Aziza 2008, 123–169).

Curiously, even though history in the "historical" comics is fictional and does not pretend to be factually accurate, or devoid of fantastical elements, such as the magic potion in *Astérix*, scholars have often studied comic books based on ancient history separately from those inspired by mythology, such as, e.g., Martin T. Dinter⁹ in the 2011 volume *Classics and Comics* edited by George Kovacs and C. W. Marshall, contrary to Aziza (2008) and Julie Gallego¹⁰ (2015) for whom both genres belong to the same *antiquité imaginaire*.

In Gallego's collection of texts on historical comics focusing on Antiquity, there are two papers on *Astérix*. One is by Nicolas Rouvière on the documentary value of the comic book (21–28). The other is by the three authors Céline Sala,

⁸ Pierre Fresnault-Deruelle (1972, 26–27) lists and discusses a catalogue of "talking" standard gesticulations expressing the feelings of characters. Their meaning is often reinforced and if required explained by the text and vice versa. These techniques were typical of *Alix*, but *Astérix* developed a more natural and pleasing drawing style.

⁹ Martin T. Dinter's chapter *Francophone Romes. Antiquity in 'Les Bandes Dessinées'* (2016), after discussing *Alix* (184–185) and *Astérix* (186–187), focuses on two much more recent and still running series: the Belgian *Murena* (188–191) by Jean Dufaux and Philippe Delaby and the Franco-Italian Enrico Marini's *Les Aigles de Rome* [The Eagles of Rome] (192). *Murena* takes place during the reigns of Claudius and Nero. The series began in 1997 published by Dargaud; after Delaby died in 2014, Théo Caneschi replaced him as artist. The first album by Dufaux and Caneschi entitled *Murena. Le Banquet* came out in November 2017 as the tenth chapter of the series. *The Eagles of Rome*, more recent of the two, created by the writer-illustrator Enrico Marini and taking place in the first century BC, had its last (fifth) instalment in 2016.

¹⁰ Gallego's favourite *ancient* comic strip is *Alix* (2015, 14).

Éric Villagordo, and Jacky Halimi and is entitled *Astérix or Humanist Education through Parody* (29–39). We find no mention here of intriguing monsters and creatures, no word even of the delightful Idéfix aka Dogmatix. In *Son of Classics and Comics*, published in 2016, one quarter of the book, a section called *All Gaul*, is this time devoted to *Astérix* (Kovacs and Marshall 2016, 111–157). The themes discussed include classical ethnographic perceptions, autochthony, and translations of the series into other languages, nothing about Idéfix.

In further exploring French comic books in search of a suitable creature, I realized that one certain way of finding mythical monsters was to turn to strips more directly inspired by mythology, and specifically to stories about the proverbial monster-slayer, Hercules. This mythical character has probably been one of the figures most often featured in film, television, and video games since the beginnings of these media.¹¹ The *bande dessinée* has been no exception. The hero attracts audiences of all ages but particularly children and young people, for the obvious reasons of his unusual childhood, already heroic, his upbringing and training, and universal values displayed when facing adversity and duplicity with honour and bravery in the manner of noble superheroes. Polish children learn by heart at school a famous poem by the Romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855), *Ode to Youth* (1820), where without mentioning Hercules' name, a whole stanza is devoted to him, specifically to his youthful deeds presented as a model and evidence of the power of youth, an age when caution does not yet blur one's commitment to ideals:

Dzieckiem w kolebce kto łeb urwał Hydrze,
Ten młody zdusi Centaury,
Piektu ofiarę wydrze,
Do nieba pójdzie po laury.

A babe in cradle who tore off Hydra's head
When older – will strangle the Centaurs,
From Hell will snatch the dead,
To Heaven will reach for laurels.¹²

¹¹ See Thomas Leitch (2007, 207–235), namely the chapter *The Hero with a Hundred Faces* with the title borrowed from Joseph Campbell's famous book (first ed. 1949). Leitch enumerates literary heroes appearing on the screen coming up with Count Dracula (121 times), Tarzan (108), Frankenstein's monster (102), and Sherlock Holmes (84), without mentioning Hercules. However, according to my own undoubtedly conservative count (taking into consideration screen productions where Hercules is only one of the main characters), Hercules has reached the honourable number of sixty film and television, live actor and animated appearances.

¹² The Polish original is available at <<http://wolnelektury.pl/katalog/lektura/oda-dolmiodosci>>. All translations are mine, unless stated otherwise.

Children in Poland, in France, and elsewhere, have been consistently bombarded by movies and television films featuring Hercules, especially since the 1990s re-enforcing the image of the hero not without help from mythological comic strips.¹³ Occasionally, Hercules' image suffered an adverse deformation due to his extraordinary physical prowess which was ridiculed and thought to impact negatively his intellect and his reputation.¹⁴ Never bad as such but certainly not wise, if not downright naïve, stupid, vain, selfish, arrogant, and tactless – in a word, a muscled brute, a kinder version of Gaston from Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (1991).

Socrates the Half-Dog

The twenty-first century brought further mythological comic strips largely at the service of education, with a significant exception created by a titan of French artistic comics, Joann Sfar and his illustrator Christophe Blain (2002; 2004; 2009)¹⁵ who not only treat Heracles like a body-building dimwit but make him companion to Socrates, his half-dog, half-philosopher. Finally, a beast worth chasing!

Socrates the half-dog follows in the footsteps of Milou and Dogmatix, his predecessors in French comic strips, and gets far ahead of them making the transition from the dog of the main character (Tintin), or of even of the sidekick (Obélix) to the main character, whose sidekicks are Hercules, Odysseus, and Oedipus, one hero per album, with Heracles being present in all three: *Socrate le demi-chien. Héraclès* (2002); *Socrate le demi-chien. Ulysse* (2004); *Socrate le demi-chien. Œdipe à Corinthe* (2009). These are Socrates the half-dog's adventures, his views and reflections on human nature, gods, and heroes – mythology as seen by an animal, one that is friendly and helpful and half philosopher. He is clearly a hybrid in the best Greek mythological tradition even though, visually, he remains a dog. From the point of view of character, when compared to his master, the half-god, it is not the master who comes out the winner. Socrates is a strange looking dog, "of an undefined breed", as Goscinny would have said, who

¹³ For a review of the many appearances of Hercules in audiovisual culture (films and television series) see, e.g., Nisbet (2008, 45–66); Dumont (2013, 127–174, and particularly 164–174); Olechowska (2020).

¹⁴ The image of Hercules as a hero with a perfect physique had certainly been well established by countless so-called *peplum* films where his role (as well as the roles of other ancient heroes) was performed by authentic and professional bodybuilders.

¹⁵ See also Olechowska (2018) – an entry on Joann Sfar and Christophe Blain in *Our Mythical Childhood Survey*. On their huge popularity in spite of the avant-garde character of Sfar and his collaborators' comics, see Grove (2013, 186 and 192). For an analysis of the comics and graphic novels Sfar wrote and illustrated himself, see Leroy (2014).

introduces himself to the reader – with irrefutable Socratic-canine logic – as Hercules’ dog; half-dog, half-philosopher; son of Zeus’ dog, hence an immortal being.

The dog’s philosophy relies on letting life decide for you, doing nothing and being driven by basic, biological needs including the obligation to follow his master: when hungry, he eats; when sleepy, he sleeps. Life is good when he does not need to make any decisions. A stereotypical dog, yet he is also able to talk and even read and write – the latter is a skill Hercules apparently did not master. In the course of the book, Socrates proves to have a more complex psyche and powerful values which lead him to disobey even Zeus, like in the case of baby Oedipus “exposed” to die in the forest in volume 3. Oedipus is saved from death and cared for by the half-dog philosopher out of a regard for life and a very human sense of decency.

Socrates represents what Thierry Groensteen, theoretician of the comic book, calls in his classification “un narrateur improbable” (Groensteen 2011, 115). Sfar used this device already in his hugely successful series *Le Chat du Rabbín* (Sfar 2002–2019) now amounting to nine published volumes. The unlikely narrator there is a cat who swallowed a parrot and in this way acquired the ability to speak. Here, in *Socrate le demi-chien*, the dog displays non-canine skills that go far beyond speech; the rationale explaining them is accordingly more developed, while the underlying logic of the explanation remains in the realm of fantastic associations rather than prosaic reasoning. Socrates, half-dog, half-philosopher, brags about being at the same time the offspring of Zeus’ dog and a companion to a demi-god. The two natures, the canine and the philosophical, are not suppressed but usually, the philosophical one takes the lead.

Socrates the half-dog’s sidekick, Hercules, is a big fellow, with a hairy chest and limbs and a very small head, almost half the size that the canon requires.¹⁶ Odysseus and Oedipus display also greatly diminished personalities as heroes, mainly in their moral and mental make-up. Zeus is presented in his traditional role, omnipotent and omnipresent but bound on one hand by Destiny and on the other limited by his anthropomorphic weaknesses, particularly when it comes to women.

In order to allow the reader to fully appreciate the extraordinary transformation of the myth, we must present the story itself.

Album 1: *Hercules*

The first volume sets the scene for the entire cycle explaining the specific universe of the book and its characters; its main theme is human relations, with an emphasis on relations between men and women, supposedly in the ancient,

¹⁶ The Vitruvian man’s head is one-eighth of his entire figure. Such treatment earned this particular variety of Hercules a name in French comics: the microcephalic hero (Vessel 2010, 143).

mythical world but in fact universally. Human relations are seen from the unusual perspective of an animal who is also a philosopher. After learning about Socrates' and his master's parentage, appearance, and character, we are told and shown that dogs and men are quite different in the way they treat females of their species. Socrates is so worried by Hercules' casual attitude to sex and by the number of his indiscriminate conquests that he decides to take his master to Ithaca to show him a wonderful and enduring marriage, that of Odysseus and Penelope, an example of true love to follow.

Album 2: *Odysseus*¹⁷

Socrates' plan proves to be a total failure. When they arrive on the island and meet the queen, she tells Hercules that Odysseus did not stay long after returning from his journeys, in fact he just left, abandoning her again for no apparent reason. Hercules eases Penelope's suffering the only way he knows how. Enters Telemachus, convinced that his mother is being raped. Telemachus attacks Hercules who, taking the young man for a bandit, runs him through with his sword. The distraught Penelope asks Hercules to leave. The half-dog and his master flee to the harbour where they join the crew of a fishing vessel. Socrates is worried: "My master probably just killed an important literary figure" (plate on page 6).

Exasperated by Hercules' insouciant behaviour, as if nothing happened, Socrates reflects on the thoughtless and brutal nature of men. Still, he admits that Hercules "is also a canonical literary figure, I have to guard over him" (plate on page 6) instead of dreaming up a just punishment for him. By strange coincidence, Odysseus travels on the same boat. They are soon shipwrecked in a mysterious storm and then attacked by pirates, which is fortunate because after killing the pirates, they at least have a boat on which to sail away. After landing in Corinth, they visit the temple of love. Odysseus' and Hercules' behaviour in the temple, where they treat women as mere objects and show total disregard for their fate, demonstrates that Socrates' hopes for showing his master a positive model of a relationship with women were unrealistic. Being soft-hearted, Socrates is moved by pity and takes with him on the boat an ugly girl who does not want to remain a priestess forever. She would have been condemned to that destiny had nobody claimed her. They all go back to the boat and continue the journey. That night, Odysseus confesses to Hercules that he abandoned Penelope because at this late stage of life he finally understood that he preferred men. He promptly seduces Hercules, who proves willing but insists on total secrecy to preserve his masculine image. Because the priestess witnesses the sex scene

¹⁷ A well-known mosaic portrait of Odysseus with spiky red hair from La Olmeda, Pedrosa de la Vega, Spain, from between the late fourth and early fifth centuries AD was probably Blain's model for the character of Odysseus in the second volume of *Socrates the Half-Dog*; the resemblance is uncanny.

between him and Odysseus, Hercules feels compelled to kill her. Socrates attempts to save the girl but is beaten up by his master. Hercules, after disposing of the girl (killing her with a sword and then eating her flesh to destroy evidence of the murder), sails away with Odysseus, leaving the wounded half-dog to fend for himself on a deserted island.

In fact, the island is inhabited by a blind Cyclops and his goats. Unexpectedly, the Cyclops' name is not Polyphemus and he proves to be another fantastic hybrid: this Cyclops is also Homer, the great epic poet. Not half Cyclops, half poet but a full Cyclops and full poet in one. Naturally, he is blind and, as we know from the *Odyssey*, he was blinded by Nemo *alias* Odysseus. Socrates befriends Homer, but he has to tread carefully, because Homer remembers that philosophers did not appreciate his art and recommended that poets be banished from the ideal city.

Homer confesses to Socrates that he lives only in the hope of one day finding and killing the enemy who took away his sight. The half-dog tries to fuel Homer's desire for revenge and tells him that the culprit is Odysseus, now sailing with his son Telemachus' murderer, Hercules. Homer decides to find the guilty pair and to punish them by telling Odysseus the truth about Telemachus' death. Homer's father Poseidon tells Socrates that the two heroes are no longer together, they had quarrelled and now Hercules is laying siege to Ithaca against Odysseus. To add insult to injury, Penelope pretends not to recognize her husband and refuses to open the door of the palace, forcing Odysseus to camp outside. Homer with Socrates enthusiastically join the fight against Hercules, but lacking military experience, they rapidly end up in captivity. Hercules decides to challenge Homer to a duel, but his crew – encouraged by Socrates – insist on him being blindfolded to compensate for Homer's handicap. During the duel, Hercules' ship sinks and the Cyclops Homer raises huge waves that destroy Hercules' fleet, at the same time lifting the siege of Ithaca. Poseidon saves Hercules from the storm and from Homer by incarcerating him in an underwater prison. Odysseus is forced to give Homer his wife, his subjects, and his whole island. Unfortunately, Homer quickly realizes that governing is a difficult and time-consuming duty and he will have to abandon writing poetry. Odysseus sails away with Socrates who does not want to be the new king's dog.

Odysseus and Socrates travel and visit many islands. Odysseus greatly enjoys his freedom but soon marries a local girl named Circe, has three children with her, and puts on weight. Pirates often raid the island, so to ensure his family's safety, Odysseus organizes an effective defence against the raiders and soon becomes the village chief, a less privileged version of his previous incarnation as king. Socrates decides to leave him.

Album 3: *Oedipus at Corinth*

A king learns of a horrible prophecy concerning his new-born son and orders one of his guards to take the boy to the forest and kill him but first attaches the

bundle with the baby to a branch. Socrates hears the boy crying and attempts to convince the guard to spare him. When the guard, scared of the king's anger, refuses, Socrates curses him with the vengeance of the gods; to his enormous surprise, the curse works and the guard is struck by lightning. Socrates quips: "I devote all my energies to philosophy, and it is mythology that saves me. Astonishing!" (plate on page 6). The ground opens and monsters – looking like dinosaurs – drag the screaming guard to the Underworld.

As Socrates tries to take the infant down from the branch, Zeus appears to him in the form of multiple eyes embedded in the bark of the trees, and tells him to leave the child well alone because of a sinister prophecy: if he saves the boy, "a first class Greek tragedy" is bound to happen (plate on page 7). After a short exchange with Zeus about free will and the power of a proper education, Socrates decides to bring up the child himself in order to teach him how to be a better master. Before Socrates manages to detach the child from the branch, the King of Corinth hunting in the forest, shoots and wounds the dog who appears in his eyes to have been molesting the child. The wounded Socrates hurries after the king and persuades him to take him to the palace as the child's teacher. Before fainting from his wounds, Socrates warns the king about the prophecy.

In the palace, the childless queen is very happy to have acquired a young son out of the blue. Socrates is planning already an education for the boy, designed to counteract the prophecy by neutralizing his sexual desires and any tendency to violence. He convinces the king to transfer the boy to the temple of love¹⁸ where the priestesses would not allow the child to develop aggressive inclinations by providing a permissive environment. Unfortunately, the queen wants to keep the child close and orders that the interfering dog be killed. Socrates then flees the palace. Socrates asks Zeus for help, but this time heaven remains silent. Socrates steals the child during the night and brings him to the temple of love, where he selects one of the priestesses to be the boy's nurse.

The child is hungry and they must find milk for him. Socrates tries to wake up the owner of a nearby mill. There they find Hercules, who makes love to the miller's wife. Socrates' barking wakes up the miller. When he sees Hercules with his wife, he loudly protests and is promptly decapitated by the annoyed hero. Hercules is overjoyed to see his dog, but Socrates runs away with the boy and his nurse. On the shore of a river, Zeus appears to them as a bizarre hybrid of a stone, fish, and the dog's reflection in the water. He asks Socrates to serve his son as he did before and keep him out of trouble. When the dog mocks Zeus' strange appearance, the god transforms into a hybrid of a bull, swan, cloud, and golden rain, then settles on being only a huge bull. He tells Socrates that Hercu-

¹⁸ The famous temple of Aphrodite in Corinth. When Zeus appears to Socrates after the King of Corinth throws him out of the palace, he calls it the temple of Athena (a plate on page 17). Did Sfar make just an error, or is it an indication that he considers such pedantic details of no importance?

les is lost without him: after Odysseus finally came back to his family, Hercules, cursed by Hera, murdered his own wife and children. Socrates has a different interpretation of Hercules' madness – according to him, Hercules envied Odysseus his recovered marital bliss and being unable to interfere with Odysseus and his family, destroyed his own.

Socrates refuses to serve Hercules ever again because of his own new mission of saving the baby Oedipus. In the meantime, they are overrun by the Corinthian army under the command of the king. Hercules kills several of the soldiers, which makes the king inclined to negotiate. The king says that the loss of the infant made his wife desperate, but Hercules advises the king that his long-lost dog insists on keeping and bringing up the baby himself. If the queen is getting difficult, Hercules suggests, then the king should kill her. They leave with the baby but the king insists on getting the boy and sends again his army after them. Hercules fights the soldiers and is victorious. After the battle he starts wooing the nurse but the hungry baby cries and interrupts his courtship.

Hercules is forced by Socrates to bring a whole dairy cow to provide milk for the baby. The boy drinks the milk and grows up fast, becoming a teenager almost instantly. The overly liberal education he was given results in precocious and indiscriminate sexual activity, which causes a scene between Oedipus and Hercules. Hercules finally decides to make a real man out of the boy. He beats Oedipus up and throws him down a hill. The boy slides into a deep cave where there are wolves. Hercules tells him how to fight the wolves by directing his anger on them. Oedipus vanquishes the wolves not without Socrates' help.

The last caption of the book announces a continuation of the story in the next album: *Œdipe roi*. As that was ten years ago, the plans for a fourth album have probably been permanently shelved.

Sfar's Vision, or "cette promenade joyeuse dans le mythe"¹⁹

When in the universe of myths did Sfar insert the timeline of *Socrates the Half-Dog*? In the first volume, Socrates mentions the Twelve Labours, obviously this should be taken as the *terminus post quem*. In volume two, Odysseus has returned to Ithaca – this indicates that at least ten years have passed after the War of Troy ended. In the same volume, we learn that Cyclops Homer, after taking Ithaca from Odysseus, will have no more time for composing poetry, i.e. both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* must have been already written. In volume three, there is mention of Hercules' madness resulting in the murder of his family. Zeus seems to attribute at least part of the blame for the tragedy to Socrates' absence from Hercules' side during that time; this goes against the chronology of the myth

¹⁹ The expression found in Bost-Fievet and Provini (2014b, 414).

where the Twelve Labours follow the madness and are (in mythological fact and logic) an attempt to atone for the crime.²⁰

There is another minor chronological wrinkle, one related to the role Hercules' bow and poisoned arrows²¹ play in the Trojan War, which clearly places Hercules' "mythological" death before the events covered in the two epics; Odysseus meeting with Hercules' shade in the Underworld (Hom. *Od.* 11.601–625) also points to the hero's earlier demise. On the other hand, the *Iliad* tells of an earlier siege and sack of Troy led by Hercules against Laomedon, Priam's father, as punishment for his breaking a pledge to offer Hercules his magic horses, a gift from Zeus, in return for his slaying of Poseidon's sea monster (Hom. *Il.* 7.451–453; 20.145–148; 21.442–457).

Placing the birth of Oedipus over a decade after the fall of Troy is another serious manipulation of mythological chronology: according to Homer, Oedipus died well before the Trojan War (Hom. *Il.* 23.679–680). Post-Homeric versions of the myth of Oedipus, while bringing such changes as self-inflicted blindness, the loss of kingship, voluntary banishment and life of a beggar, do not interfere with the chronology as such (cf. Wilson 2007).

Mélanie Bost-Fievet and Sandra Provini, the editors of a 2014 conference book on *Antiquity in Contemporary Imagination*, in their introduction to one of the chapters (2014b, 414), briefly mention Sfar's comic book as an example of parodic writing of the kind Gérard Genette classified as created in the "ludic mode" as opposed to "satirical" or "serious". The ludic mode is used to produce "pur amusement ou exercice distractif, sans intention agressive ou moqueuse".²²

²⁰ Ancient sources provide also a different sequence: Euripides' chronology in his play *Hercules* sets the madness immediately after the Twelfth Labour: Hercules is in the Underworld where he went to capture Cerberus; in Thebes Lycus overthrew Creon and wants to execute Amphitryon, Megara and her children. Hercules returns from Hades in time to save his family but Hera sends Iris and Madness to deprive him of reason; he kills not only Lycus but also Megara and the children. When he is himself again, he wants to die; Theseus whom he brought from the Underworld convinces him not to commit suicide and takes him to Athens. See also Nisbet (2008, 53–54).

²¹ After Achilles' death, Calchas predicted that the war could not be won without Hercules' bow and arrows. Philoctetes lit Hercules' funeral pyre on Mount Oeta after the hero was poisoned with the dying Centaur Nessus' blood and for that favour was rewarded with Hercules' bow and arrows. There are several different versions of Philoctetes' participation in the Trojan War but they all agree that he mortally wounds Paris, see Robert Graves (1996, vol. II, 592–593, 620–622); the story of Philoctetes left on Lemnos en route to Troy, after being bitten by a snake is told by Homer, *Iliad* 2.716–720; in the *Odyssey* 3.219–220 Odysseus tells the Phaeacians about Philoctetes' skills in archery: "Only Philoctetes excelled me with the bow in the land of the Trojans, when we Achaeans shot".

²² "Aims at a sort of pure amusement or pleasing exercise, with no aggressive or mocking intention", Genette (1982, 46).

Bost-Fievet and Provini call Sfar's strip "une promenade joyeuse dans le mythe" – "a joyful walk through the myth" (ibid.).

What does that "joyful walk through the myth" entail and what kind of monsters does the reader encounter? The summary of the story demonstrates that the myth provides only a canvas on which Sfar and Blain (as the illustrator) paint their original picture, anchored in myth but quite new, both in their assessment of characters as well as in the story itself. The well-known facts of the myth are not changed but rather loosely manipulated. They seem to have happened at different times than the action of the story. The reader does not witness them, they are only referred to in order to illustrate specific points.

While it is uncertain what Socrates the half-dog was doing during his master's heroic deeds, the traditional monsters²³ related to Hercules' story are mentioned on a few plates supplementing Socrates' description of his master's character. For instance, the half-dog explains on four plates (page 15, vol. 1: *Hercules*)²⁴ Hercules' ease in seducing women by the fact that "luckily women often fall victim to horrible monsters"; "[t]hen my master with his bare hands kills the monster"; and "[t]hat spares him the need of chitchat" as "[h]e is somewhat shy". The monster in this particular case seems to be a generic three-headed Hydra-like creature with the body of a lion. "My master never thinks of death" is illustrated by a plate featuring his fight with the Nemean Lion. "He is very busy" announces his killing of the Lernaean Hydra. "He thinks only of fights" corresponds to the plate depicting his clash with the centaurs – one of the so-called minor labours (all plates are on page 25). "My master is a hero" relates to a drawing of Hercules chasing the Hind of Ceryneia. "He is not one of those who let themselves be humiliated by blind forces crashing ordinary humans" is the caption on the plate showing Hercules facing the Cretan Bull; the next plate signed: "He intervenes when things go badly" depicts him fighting the enraged Mares of Diomedes; he manages to calm them on the next plate: "And all is good again. That's what heroes do" (plates on page 26).

The adventures of volume 2 (*Odysseus*) – and namely: the love affair between Hercules and Odysseus, their sea voyage interrupted by a mysterious storm (after two unsuccessful attempts to calm it,²⁵ the storm abates when Hercu-

²³ Curiously, when Socrates curses the King of Corinth's guard, the monsters who drag him into the Underworld through an open fissure in the ground, strangely resemble dinosaurs (a plate on page 6, vol. 3) and not any of the known Greek mythological monsters. See above, page 483.

²⁴ The page numbers listed in brackets refer to numbers handwritten on the plates.

²⁵ First, a member of the crew, a Jew named Jonah, guilty of disobedience to his God, is thrown into the sea to calm the storm. He is swallowed by an enormous fish but the storm still rages (four plates on page 8). For Jonah, see 2 Kings 14:25. Jonah was a prophet who lived in the eighth century BC, the period corresponding to the creation of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. His presence on the boat with Odysseus is chronologically possible and constitutes Sfar's humorous attempt at synchronizing

les, Odysseus, and Socrates all jump into the raging sea), the incident with the pirates, the murder of the priestess, and the beaching of Hercules' dog on the deserted island – are all new developments unknown to mythology. The whole episode of Socrates meeting and befriending the Cyclops Homer and the role they both play in the otherwise unknown and unidentified war between Odysseus and Hercules, is another fascinating addition by Sfar and Blain to the myth.

The volume 3 (*Oedipus at Corinth*) tells the story of young Oedipus. This time the myth, while significantly changed, still remains within the traditional parameters, i.e. a son is born to an unspecified king under the cloud of a terrible prophecy and (almost) finds his way to the King of Corinth's family. Here Sfar takes exception to the mythological story by entrusting Oedipus to the unlikely couple Socrates and Hercules, to be brought up and educated by them. Socrates fulfils his self-appointed mission against Zeus' will and in spite of the King of Corinth's armed resistance, takes care of the boy (with Hercules' participation in this "thirteenth" labour).²⁶ He hopes to educate Oedipus so he can live a different life from the one foretold by the prophecy (i.e. refraining from killing his father and wedding his mother).

The permissive education Socrates advocates for Oedipus in order to change his tragic destiny leads to a conflict with Hercules, when they clash over sexual favours provided to both by the same woman, Oedipus' nurse. Heracles finds Oedipus' behaviour (having sex with the nurse) questionable and decides to teach him how to be a real man by forcing him to fight a pack of wolves. Socrates of course jumps in to assist Oedipus and it looks like a success. Still, we do not know whether Oedipus will kill his father and have children with his mother. Incidentally, Homer's version of the myth brings a somewhat milder fate for Oedipus: while his mother-wife does commit suicide after she learns his identity, he does not blind himself and become a miserable beggar but remains king of Thebes and eventually dies victorious in battle.²⁷

What would the great Greek tragic playwrights have to say about Sfar's unfinished version of the myth? And what would Freud do? Sfar and Blain regrettably remain silent – they can afford to, as none of the other gentlemen is likely to protest.

Greek mythology with the Bible. Second, Odysseus reveals himself to be the king of Ithaca, who abandoned his wife and children. He jumps into the waves, and again the storm continues (all plates on page 9).

²⁶ Socrates tells Hercules that Zeus allegedly said that Hercules' thirteenth labour (one plate on page 38) would be to properly bring up Oedipus, so that he would become a man of integrity.

²⁷ Homer, *Iliad* 23.679–680, mentions funeral games in Thebes at Oedipus' burial.

The Hybrids

The majority of legendary and mythological creatures are hybrids. The concept of a hybrid is as ancient as mythology itself. It is a rare kind of free inspiration that allows one to create completely new hybrids. This is what Sfar and Blain do in *Socrates the Half-Dog* when they introduce to the myths of Hercules, Odysseus, and Oedipus their own fantastic hybrid creatures, applying their own joyous and delightful innovations to these old stories tarnished and worn-out by millennia of readers and imitators.

Besides the narrator and protagonist Socrates the half-dog himself, we encounter in the second volume (*Odysseus*) three unusual hybrids. The most intriguing among these is the Cyclops called Homer. The other two are incarnations of Zeus who appears successively to Socrates, baby Oedipus, and his nurse as a stone-fish-dog's reflection and later, criticized by Socrates, takes the form of a multiple hybrid (bull-swan-cloud-golden rain) as suggested by the nurse (plates on page 26). Zeus explains the form of the first of the hybrids by saying: "I was in a hurry so I took on the form that was on hand" (plates on page 26), providing an insight into his transformational abilities and philosophy.²⁸ Both manifestations of Zeus identify him rather as a shapeshifter than a god and highlight certain limitations and a lack of sensitivity as well as vanity (in the case of the first hybrid) and lack of imagination (in the case of the second).

The other hybrids have no divine powers but rather abilities and talents belonging either to their human nature or to their animal half. Socrates looks and functions like a dog but reasons, talks, reads, and writes like a philosopher; Homer looks like a Cyclops (he has one blind eye in his forehead, is huge and incredibly strong) but he is also a great poet. What Homer undoubtedly has in common with cyclops at this stage of the story is blindness. Sfar suggests that Odysseus, blinding Polyphemus, blinded in fact Homer, the poet who with his Muse sang his exploits and misfortunes, as we know from the opening lines of the *Odyssey*. At the same time this new version of the myth offers an explanation of Homer's blindness. Sfar's play with the myth is refreshingly inventive: why not associate two famous blind characters from the same ancient period and roll them together to produce all sorts of inspiring consequences?

Homer in Sfar and Blain's book does not know who blinded him and this fact becomes an element of the plot, even though in the actual poem, Odysseus, once he and his crew escaped from Polyphemus' cave, could not refrain from taunting the Cyclops and admitting who he was – that was how Poseidon knew whom to punish for the maiming of his son. Odysseus' hubris and conceit at having

²⁸ The concept of *Animagus* (a wizard who can transform into an animal) and the word *transfiguration* come to mind as well as Hogwarts students' botched attempts in Professor McGonagall's class (J. K. Rowling 1999, 233); Zeus, had he lived in Harry Potter universe, would have been classified as a variety of *Animagus*, cf. Rowling (1999, 83–84).

outsmarted the Cyclops were his undoing and condemned him to exile from his home, wife, and family for ten more years. Sfar puts on the glasses of a contemporary satirist and sees Odysseus as a veteran of wars and adventures who got so used to a wanderer's existence and company of men, that he could not stand being cooped up again on a small Greek island and had to flee this overwhelming marital bliss. This is an attitude occurring in soldiers and veterans of contemporary armed conflicts, who after having experienced the trauma of war cannot easily re-adapt to the civilian world and peacetime life.

Travelling from island to island, Odysseus finally hooks up with a girl by the name of Circe and becomes domesticated again. It is not evident if this girl had only the same name as the sorceress, his lover from the *Odyssey*, or whether it was indeed the same Circe ensnaring Odysseus for the first time in a skewed timeline, or if it was a return to an old flame.

Ancient hybrids are traditionally combinations of two or more animals or of a human and an animal. They are also monstrous, terrifying, and deadly. They rarely talk and they lack human intellect; instead they have an animal cunning, are hostile towards people and wicked. Quick to anger, they delight in inspiring fear and in indiscriminate killing. Sfar and Blain's hybrids on the other hand, have a single-species body, but a hybrid personality composed of significantly disparate elements: the dog who is a philosopher and the Cyclops who is a poet. In line with the ancient hybrids, they both have some sort of connection to the Greek gods: the dog to Zeus (in fact to his dog) and the Cyclops to Poseidon. Sfar in a flight of fancy resorts here to a radical and highly original change of perspective. What if Socrates and Homer were even more complex figures than the greatest ever philosopher and epic poet? They are hybrids who left their creative days behind them and rely on their non-human nature without compromising their humanity. They are predominantly what they look like – beasts – but with the beastliness subdued by the subtle intellect of their human genius side.

Conclusion

The new hybrids created by Sfar and Blain highlight in an original manner universal but quite contemporary issues, such as the trauma of war and the place of art and philosophy in a society where military might matters the most; freedom and the role of a ruler – Socrates the half-dog refuses to be a king's dog. Socrates also lets his compassionate side (impossible to say whether it is the animal or the human element) prevail when he decides to defy Zeus' will in order to save the infant Oedipus. He does this out of decency and the need to protect the weak, but he also feels obligated to help the child cheat the prophecy, or *fatum* – letting into play a third element, the heroic.

On the other side of the spectrum, no classical influence involved, Socrates the half-dog's belief in educational science leads him to a display of unbecoming hubris and naïveté. The child is provided with alleged advantages of permissive

sex education, which according to theory should eliminate the senseless violence and aggression caused by repressed desires and by the same token should prevent Oedipus from killing his father and setting off the tragic course of events. As we are still waiting for the next album covering Oedipus' adult life to appear, we may only speculate whether the theory proved to be useful.

While for the purpose of this volume, we are naturally focused on mythical beasts, mythical heroes remain a crucial part of Sfar's novel view of Classical Antiquity. Among the three main such characters, Hercules takes the most space and is presented as a young man, driven by instinct and having little thought for the consequences of his behaviour. Odysseus is an experienced veteran, burnt out and tired of his achievements. Oedipus, first an infant, later, a teenager is clearly confused not only by his hormones but also by the permissive education that was supposed to save him from his tragic destiny. Sfar treats the mythological heroes like annoying narcissistic personalities or celebrities. In the case of Hercules and Odysseus, Sfar criticizes them for their superficiality and hypocrisy, e.g., the fact that public figures – celebrities – will try to preserve their image, even if it means killing opponents or those who threaten that image, like the ugly priestess from Corinth, the witness to Hercules and Odysseus love affair. This particular concern was much less (if at all) damaging to the reputation of a public figure in Homeric Greece than in later times; it would have been quite unlikely that the Hercules of that era would want to kill a young woman just because she saw him *in flagranti delicto* with Odysseus.

Sfar approaches several other gender issues, especially those connected to attitudes of men towards women. A half-animal proves to have more decency and integrity than a half-god; when Hercules, certain that in his absence women cannot refrain from discussing him, asks his dog to listen and report to him what they say among themselves, the dog does not comply. One of the stereotypes about men and women highlighted in the comic book is male conceit underpinned with a sense of self-importance. Sfar mocks such men and he entrusts the role of a sensitive, compassionate, and respectful being to Socrates the half-dog. A hero on the other hand (Sfar uses Hercules' case) often displays a narcissistic personality, concerned primarily with image and at the same time feeling entitled and exempt from moral norms. Nor does women's behaviour escape Sfar's (here gentler) criticism: while they are fully aware that famous heroes may treat them as sex objects, some of them are willing to ignore (forgive?) it because they view celebrities just as instrumentally. Sfar and Blain paint an image of contemporary society using barely transformed mythological templates to show the universality of myth and human nature.

In the first decades of the development of French comics, they were destined primarily for children. This orientation started to evolve after WW2, along with teenagers and young adults growing more reluctant to put childish things away and a slowly progressing consecration of comic strips to the rank of the Ninth Art. The authors of *Socrate le demi-chien*, both born three decades before the

new millennium, belong to the generation of innovative comic strip artists who abandoned the mainstream commercial *bande dessinée* and went from marginal and alternative orientation to a huge cross-public success in France. Sfar and Blain and other artists from their milieu have been published by the great French publishers who previously did not bother with comic books. The albums created by this group gained popularity among young adults; the frequent openly sexual contents theoretically restricted the access of adolescents, but in fact the circle of fans was broadened and covered older as well as younger readers.

Sfar and Blain²⁹ are artistic innovators who have produced comic books both jointly and individually. In a series of interviews with Groensteen (2013) quoted by Fabrice Leroy in his monograph *Sfar So Far*, Sfar says: “A masterpiece is only possible when a person places his or her own drawings over his or her own words” (Leroy 2014, 13–14).³⁰ Leroy brings up this quote as part of his rationale for excluding from his analysis *Socrate le demi-chien* among many other collaborative albums – it cannot be a masterpiece because the text and the image are not created by the same artist. Other theorists of the comic strip rarely touch this charming trilogy, they focus rather on Sfar’s drawing style³¹ and on his hugely popular series, such as *Professeur Bell* (1999–2006), *Pascin* (2000–2005), *Grand Vampire* (2001–2005), *Le Chat du Rabbin* (2002–2019), *Klezmer* (2005–2014), *Chagall en Russie* (2010–2011), and *Les Lumières de la France* (2011). Sfar is now one of the best-known French comic strip authors, often interviewed by the media and frequently awarded prizes at the Angoulême International Comics Festival. An articulate graduate in philosophy, he takes part in various public debates and is considered a French public intellectual (cf. Leroy 2014, 11–13). A cursory review of interviews given by Sfar in the media does not reveal any of his own opinions about *Socrate le demi-chien*, but as the series remains unfinished, we may only conclude that either his collaboration with Blain was for some reason impossible to continue, or his interest in using Greek mythology waned and was forgotten in the rush of directing films and writing novels. His readers who remember his humour and original perspective on the undying mythological heroes will miss the charm and acerbic wit of the unforgettable half-dog, half-philosopher, Socrate.

²⁹ Christophe Blain created his own successful series, *Isaac le Pirate* (2001–2005), *Quai d'Orsay* (2010–2011), and others; he received also many awards over the years at the Angoulême International Comics Festival. He has illustrated over a dozen books for children. *Socrate le demi-chien* is his only comic strip inspired by Classical Antiquity.

³⁰ Leroy’s own extensive interview with Sfar appears in his monograph (2014, 236–252).

³¹ Groensteen (2011, 128–129, 191, 197); see also Groensteen (2008, 38–39, 89, 99, 137–138).

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HANNA PAULOUSKAYA

Mythical Beasts Made Soviet: Adaptation of Greek Mythology in Soviet Animation of the 1970s

“To call this cartoon *The Story of Perseus* is somewhat misleading: it uses only one episode of the original Greek legend, and even this is condensed and simplified into a moral fable for young folk”, so states Margaret Ford’s review of a popular Soviet animation for *Monthly Film Bulletin* in January 1976 (40). The critic does not acknowledge the movie to be an adaptation of the Greek myth at all and she puts into question the cartoon’s value. What was the reason for such a negative opinion? What idea of the authors was so unacceptable for the British viewer? In this chapter, I would like to try to answer these questions and to examine this and four other movies from the series “Legendy i mify drevnei Gretsii” [Legends and Myths of Ancient Greece, 1969–1974] by Aleksandra Snezhko-Blotskaia and Aleksei Simukov,¹ and to find out what techniques were chosen by the authors to make Greek myths familiar for a Soviet audience. I wish also to confront more difficult and important questions: did the authors intend to pass down to their audience only Greek myths or certain contemporary ideas as well? How did the cultural or political context influence their interpretation of the myths? How did it effect the representation of mythical beasts and monsters in the movies?

Returning to the review and trying to answer what may be so unacceptable for the British observer in *The Story of Perseus*, in the first instance one may think about its didacticism, so common for Soviet cinema, especially cinema for children. Another peculiarity of the cartoon, which might seem awkward to the reviewer, is the reference to folktale convention by the filmmakers. In my opinion, the animation is based not only on the tradition of classical Greek art, but also on Slavic folklore imagery. The choice of the myths and of the creatures for the cartoon was, at least to a certain extent, due to the familiarity of the

¹ Transliteration of Russian names is given according to the system of the American Library Association and the Library of Congress with minor modifications: I omit diacritic signs and use “-sky” for “-skii” endings. Well-known Russian names that have their traditional spelling are written according to it.

motifs and their closeness to Russian fantastical tales. These folktales would have already been transformed by Soviet ideology, thus they might be used as a mediator for introducing Greek myth into Soviet popular culture.

While addressing the above research questions, I wish to focus on the representations of the mythical creatures, as well as specifics of the narration, comparing these with traditions of fairy tales in Russian and Soviet art and cinema, and to explore ways of introducing Greek mythology into Soviet popular culture. My special interest concerns mythical beasts in animation, how they were appropriated by Soviet filmmakers and whether they connect with fairy-tale creatures already known to wider audiences. I will base myself on the conclusions made by Vladimir Propp (1895–1970) in his structural analysis study of Slavic folklore. His works are especially important as they were written in the Soviet Union from 1928 on, and so they naturally (consciously or not) include a perspective on the contemporary Soviet reality together with scholarly analysis. I would like to start with a presentation of the animation series and an introduction of the cultural and cinematographic context of the USSR of that period.

The Debut of Mythical Creatures in Soviet Animation

The first creatures from Greek and Roman mythology appeared on Soviet screens as late as the 1960s. This was due to an order from the Ministry of Education that Soyuzmultfilm (the largest animation studio in the USSR) launch a series of five animations on mythological themes in 1969 (Bogdanova 2008, 233). It seems that, before then, a world full of gods, semi-god heroes, and mythical beasts was perceived as even more dangerous than a “normal” fairy-tale universe. The first magical tale movies in Soviet Russia were made in the mid-1930s, after a great debate about the harmfulness of fantasy and fairy-tale literature for Soviet children had been held in the late 1920s (Hellman 2013, 354–363; Dobrenko 1997, 175–177).² Nevertheless between the 1930s and 1969, when the first cartoon of the series about ancient mythology was released, over thirty years had passed, and during this time fairy tales had obtained a prominent place in animation and cinematography for children. Furthermore, Soviet culture of the late 1960s was no longer young or seeking an identity. Even the Thaw was already over, and the period of “détente” (or “stagnation”, in Russian terminology) had set in. It was at this time when the gods of Olympus and mythical beasts appeared on screens, looking for their place in Soviet culture, changing the shape and the style of imagery.

The director of all these movies was Aleksandra Snezhko-Blotskaia (1909–1980) and the screenwriter was Aleksei Simukov (1904–1995). In memoirs they

² Compare also Lisa Maurice remarks on the genre of fantasy in Israeli literature (2016).

mention that they undertook the commission with great enthusiasm (Bogdanova 2008, 233; Simukov 2008, 314–315).³ At that time both of them were already mature and respected creative individuals. Snezhko-Blotskaia had made many movies on fairy-tale themes, while Simukov was a prominent screenwriter and a lecturer at the Maxim Gorky Literature Institute. In the period that interests us he worked also at the Theatre Department of the Ministry of Culture of the USSR (1964–1971), where he had an influence on the repertory of theatres in the country.

The animations under investigation here are connected with five famous mythical heroes (actually four heroes and one Titan) and four important mythological cycles. The first movie is dedicated to Hercules and is called *Vozvrashchenie s Olimpa* [The Return from Olympus, 1969]. The story of Theseus and the Minotaur is presented in the movie *Labirint – podvigi Teseia* [Labyrinth: The Deeds of Theseus, 1970–1971]. The third animation, *Argonavty* [The Argonauts, 1971–1972], retells the myth of Jason and his band in search of the Golden Fleece. Perseus and his fight with the Gorgon Medusa is the subject of the fourth movie *Persei* [Perseus,⁴ 1973]. The last film is called *Prometei* [Prometheus, 1974] and it tells about the theft of the sacred fire and its being brought to Earth, and also about the punishment of the eponymous Titan. It seems that the authors wanted to present all the most important heroic demigod figures of Greek mythology, as well as Prometheus, the most “revolutionary” among the gods, who could not be omitted from Soviet cinematography for obvious reasons. Three of the myths have a plot quite similar to fairy tales themselves (Propp 1976, 149). This might have been an additional argument for selecting these topics.

Each cartoon lasts around 20 minutes and they were first shown in cinemas, either separately or together as a full-length movie. Afterwards they were regularly broadcast on television. The films are brightly coloured cell animations. Their common style of drawing supplemented by solemn music and narration created a specific style of “classical mythological” animation of the USSR.

Fairy Tales on Soviet Screens

In the 1960s Soviet cinema had developed a distinctive culture of representation of fairy tales and imaginative beasts in animation and live-action movies. The main place was given to Russian folklore and famous texts of Russian and

³ For more about the creators of the movies, see my paper Paulouskaya (2017).

⁴ The English review mentioned at the beginning of the article translates the title of the movie as *The Story of Perseus*.

European authors, especially Alexander Pushkin,⁵ Hans Christian Andersen,⁶ Charles Perrault,⁷ and the Brothers Grimm.⁸ Thus, the choice of the main literary fairy tales corresponds with the Western corpus of popular tales, which John Stephens (2000, 330) numbers as 10 to 15. However, many movies were based on Soviet interpretations of the tales: for example, *Zolotoi kliuchik, ili Prikliucheniia Buratino* [The Golden Key, or: The Adventures of Buratino, 1936] by Alexey Tolstoy is an interpretation of *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (1883) by Carlo Collodi, and *Volshebnik Izumrudnogo goroda* [The Wizard of the Emerald City, 1939] by Aleksandr Volkov is based on L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) and so forth, but a special didactic message was added and the texts were purged of bourgeois or capitalistic influences (Balina 2005, 110–113).

The presence of live-action films in the USSR based on fairy tales is due in great measure to Aleksandr Rou and Aleksandr Ptushko (Balina and Beumers 2016, 128–130; Paramonova 1979), who had already made their first movies in the 1930s (Ptushko, *Novyi Gulliver* [The New Gulliver, 1935] and Rou, *Po shchuch'emu velen'iu* [At the Pike's Command, 1938]). As Marina Balina and Birgit Beumers put it:

In the 1930s, the very act of creating a film based on a Russian fairy tale was courageous, since the genre had only recently returned to the arsenal of literary works approved by Soviet censorship. (2016, 128)

Preferring to shoot in open nature, Rou introduced Russian landscapes into fairy-tale movies and he was successful in adding a patriotic message to it. Ptushko made animations and live-action movies, as well as combinations of both, for example in his *The Golden Key, or: The Adventures of Buratino* made in 1939 and based on the afore-mentioned Tolstoy's novel.

Animated fairy tales were even more popular or, at least, more numerous. The first animated folktales were produced in the late 1920s (*Skazka o solomennom bychke* [The Tale of a Straw Bull], dir. Viacheslav Levandovsky,

⁵ *Skazka o rybake i rybke* [The Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish], dir. Aleksandr Ptushko, 1937; dir. Mikhail Vol'pin, 1950; *Skazka o pope i ego rabotnike Balde* [The Tale of the Priest and of his Workman Balda], dir. Mikhail Tsekhanovsky, 1930; dir. Panteleimon Sazonov, 1940; dir. Andrei Karanovich, 1956; *Skazka o tsare Saltane* [The Tale of Tsar Saltan], dirs. Tatiana Basmanova, Zinaida and Valentina Brumberg, 1943, etc.

⁶ *Devochka so spichkami* [The Little Match Girl], dir. Iurii Zheliabuzhsky, 1919; *Diimovochka* [Thumbelina], dir. Leonid Amal'rik, 1964, etc.

⁷ *Zolushka* [Cinderella], dirs. Nadezhda Kosheverova, Mikhail Shapiro, 1947; *Kot v sapogakh* [Puss in Boots], dirs. Zinaida and Valentina Brumberg, 1938, etc.

⁸ *Mal'chik-s-pal'chik* [Tom Thumb], dir. Olga Khodataeva, 1938; *Bremenskiie muzykanty* [Town Musicians of Bremen], dir. Inessa Kovalevskaia, 1969, etc.

Odessa, 1927; *Skazka o Belke-khoziaiushke i Myszke-zlodeike* [The Tale of a Squirrel-Housekeeper and a Villainous Mouse], dir. Viacheslav Levandovsky, Kiev, 1927; *Tzar Durandai* [Tsar Durandai], dirs. Ivan Ivanov-Vano, Valentina and Zinaida Brumberg, Moscow, 1934).⁹ However, the real turn to fairy tales in Soviet animation, not without Disney's influence (Pikkov 2016, 22), took place after WW2, when they became the main trend in animation for children (Pontieri 2012, 44–50).

By the 1970s, fairy tales were commonly present in Soviet animation and live-action cinematography. This was the period of the development of television broadcasting in the USSR,¹⁰ where fairy tales established their place in Soviet screen culture. In 1964 a daily programme for children was initiated on the Central Television of the USSR channel with short animations as part of it. It was called *Spokoinoi Nochi, Malyschi* [Good Night, Little Ones] (Roth-Ey 2011, 212) and was broadcast just before the main news programme *Vremia* [Time]. Full-length fairy tales had their time in the programme *V gostiakh u skazki* [On a Visit to Fairy Tales].¹¹ At the same time animated and live-action fairy tales were shown in cinemas, “palaces of culture”, and schools. There were special screenings for children and even special movie theatres for children, often travelling ones, such as a bus refurnished as a cinema. In my childhood, a children's movie theatre in my city (Hrodna, Belarus) was set up in a real old airplane situated in an amusement park.

Animations of Aleksandra Snezhko-Blotskaia

Snezhko-Blotskaia made her mythological series after she had completed many animations based on Russian folklore and that of other nations while employed at the studio Soyuzmultfilm. At the beginning of her career she served as assistant director of the afore-mentioned Ivanov-Vano, with whom she created animations on Russian folklore: *Konëk-gorbunok* [The Little Humpbacked Horse, 1947], *Gusi-lebedi* [The Magical Geese-Swans, 1949], and *Snegurochka* [The Snow Maiden, 1952]. Working independently as a director she made adaptations of tales from various peoples: the Russian *Verlioka* (1956), Lithuanian *Iantarnyi zamok* [The Amber Castle, 1959], Burmese *Drakon* [Dragon, 1960–1961], Kazakh *Chudesnyi sad* [The Magical Garden, 1962], and Chukchi *Doch' solntsa* [The Daughter of the Sun, 1963]. She also filmed stories of Rudyard Kipling, namely *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* (1965) and *Kot, kotoryi gulial sam*

⁹ More on the early history of Soviet animation see Ginzburg (1957, 70–162), Ivanov-Vano (1967).

¹⁰ For more on Soviet TV broadcasting, see Roth-Ey (2011).

¹¹ The programme was broadcast from 1976 till 1992 on the Central Television of the USSR channel. Its time slot was on Fridays, Saturdays, or Sundays in different periods.

po sebe [The Cat that Walked by Himself, 1968], and Alexander Pushkin's *Skazka o zolotom petushke* [The Tale of the Golden Cockerel, 1967].

In their visual aspect, Ivanov-Vano's animations and some of Snezhko-Blotskaia's films resemble the style of Disney. This is visible in the round outlines of the human characters and the specific way of depicting animals, although both directors aimed to base their style primarily on Russian traditional art (Pontieri 2012, 40; Pikkov 2016, 20–24). This likeness is well grounded, as the Disney studio had a great impact on Soviet animation at the beginning of its history (Roshal' 1936, 6–7; Pontieri 2012, 38–42). Soyuzmultfilm emulated Disney's technological process (the "Disney assembly line") after several Russian animators from the studio made a visit to the USA in the early 1930s. However, afterwards the "Americanization" of Soviet art was condemned and the artists were called to base their work on Russian traditions and not to imitate a capitalistic example (Ginzburg 1957, 139; Ivanov-Vano 1967, 53; 1974, 28 and 31).

Snezhko-Blotskaia's series on ancient mythology differs from her previous works and shows the least similarity to Disney movies. These films have a less detailed and contrasted background, a slighter presence of animal characters and they lack singing parts. However, all the movies from the series have a common style. This may be characterized by a similar colour palette in warm sunny tones (common for depicting the Mediterranean region) and a solemn and calm music accompaniment. The dialogues are made in the style of Homer's poems and Russian retellings of Greek mythology by Nicholas Kuhn (*Legendy i mify drevnei Gretsii* [Legends and Myths of Ancient Greece]), first published in 1914 and highly popular in the USSR.¹² This influenced the language of the movies, making them sound archaic and grandiloquent, a quality which lends them a stateliness typical for epic, and thus puts these works in the context of this genre's tradition as well.

The films in the series are quite similar to one another, especially the stories of Theseus, Jason, and Perseus. The specific quality of the Hercules movie might be due to its pioneering character (this movie opened the series) – it seems that the authors were in search of an appropriate form for presenting Greek myths. This animation is much more ideological than the other films and it contains a great deal of propaganda elements. The last movie, *Prometheus*, varies due to the different character of the story – it retells a myth dedicated to a Titan, not a heroic cycle of myths. The plot of the movie is much more coherent and it contains the fewest digressions. At the same time, the first and the last movies pay greater attention to Greek gods than other films. The three other movies correspond to fairy tales in greater measure.

¹² About the popularity of Kuhn's mythology, see Ermolaeva (2016, 243).

The Fairy-Tale Character of Snezhko-Blotskaia's Myths

A typical plot of a fairy tale tells of a main hero who has to achieve a goal by resolving smaller tasks. If the protagonist is male, the goal may be connected with saving a woman (often a princess). The plot usually includes a journey by the main hero through a magical world. As a rule, the action takes place in some distant past, one left undefined by the tale, though often interpreted as the medieval or early modern era. Contrary to the Disney tradition, where the main hero is “generally a member of the aristocracy or an extraordinary person, unfortunate and liable to be persecuted” (Zipes 2016, 8), Soviet cinema preferred heroes of peasant origin. As a result, even the “unfortunate princess” is often transformed into a peasant girl.¹³ In the movies filmed during or just after WW2, this woman-figure is interpreted as Mother Russia who is in need of saving (Balina and Beumers 2016, 125 and 129).

The myths of Theseus, Perseus, and Jason and the Argonauts correspond to a traditional magical-tale schema. Propp even calls the Argonauts' plot “a classical fairy tale” (2012, 24). The scholar emphasizes that the difference between myths and folktales is in their “social function” or “in how people approach them” (Propp 2012, 24). Myths, contrary to folktales, were perceived as true stories and were connected with religious ritual and belief, but myths' composition or form of narration may be very similar to folktales. In contemporary culture, neither fairy tales nor classical myths are an object of belief. On the other hand, both of them create certain patterns of thinking and ways of perceiving reality for their audience, so they still act as myths (Stephens 2000, 331). Joseph Campbell in his revolutionary works on mythology and religion combines a fairy tale with a myth and a religion's founding story, finding similar patterns in all the narratives and looking for archetypal roots for this phenomenon. He uses a knowledge of fairy-tale structure to gain an understanding of mythical narration. Campbell also underlines the supreme role of the hero and his adventures, understanding it as a story of initiation and transformation of the hero (2004, 45–227).

Soviet culture, as shown above, had a long tradition of retelling fairy tales. As a result it produced its own ideological substitute for the fairy-tale messages, adopting fables for its own needs. In my opinion, it also used this modified pattern as a mediator in introducing Greek myths for the Soviet viewer, making a chain of reception in Charles Martindale's terms (1993). Consider the following statement by Simukov taken from his application to serve as a screenwriter for the *Theseus* movie:

In this story I propose to create a lively, attractive image of Theseus, a defender of the people, a fighter against evil, which is so vividly represented in the image of the Minotaur, half man, half bull, who symbolizes the lowest elemental forces of

¹³ Cf. the fairy tales directed by Rou highly promoting peasant culture, especially of the Russian people.

mankind. Of course, much of the content of the ancient myth will be rethought to make it clearer and more intriguing. (Simukov 1969–1970, 1)¹⁴

This description may be compatible with any of the films of the series, as well as with nearly any fairy tale filmed in the Soviet Union. An image of a “defender of the people”, a hero who embodies a nation and fights “evil” understood as some cosmic incarnation of “the lowest forces of mankind”, is common to Soviet interpretations of fairy tales, at least in its ideal form. A closer look at the animations will help us see what elements of fables proposed by Propp are present in them and how they are used (Propp 2012, 147–178).

The Opening and the Closing of Narration

As fairy tales usually exist in an oral form and are performed, it is common for them to have a narrative framing. A typical beginning for a Russian folktale would be “v nekotorem tsarstve, v nekotorem gosudarstve” [in a certain land, in a certain kingdom] or “zhili-byli” [once there lived]. However, a folktale may also have a longer introduction called a *priskazka* [foretale], announcing that a fable will start (Propp 2012, 151; Mayenowa 1979, 269). The framing is used also in literary or cinematographic retellings and helps to identify the genre. In four of his films, Rou even presents an old woman¹⁵ who is telling the story from the windowsill of a wooden house, and opens and closes the shutters at the beginning and the end of the story.¹⁶ We may find a similar approach in the animations that concern us here. The Greek myths, of course, would not use folktale formulas, but the composition of the films is often complex and contains a framing story.

The closest to a fairy tale is the framing in *The Argonauts*. The movie starts with two young Greek boys playing on the seashore. They notice a wrecked ship and an old man sitting nearby. The man appears to be Jason and he tells them the story of the ship *Argo* and of the Argonauts. The movie ends with the same characters. Jason praises and thanks Zeus that the *Argo* will be restored, and he asks Athena for her blessing for new journeys to come. During the prayer, Jason falls into a hole in the deck and dies, but the prayer does not end here. It is continued by the boys. The younger boy asks the older if he believes in the story and if he is not afraid. The later confirms his fearlessness, and we see an image of a future *Argo* on the waves. This episode is rooted in a description of the Argonauts’ myth by the brothers Lev and Vsevolod Uspensky (1941, 98–102), where it is added to the final part of the narration. In contrast with the book, the animation puts the scene also in the beginning and this makes the framing. It also

¹⁴ Hereinafter trans. H. P., unless otherwise stated.

¹⁵ She was played always by the same actress, Anastasiia Zueva (1896–1986).

¹⁶ For more on female tellers of folktales, see Melikyan (2006, 194–201).

includes a storyteller, though he does not address the viewer of the movie but the characters inside it.

The Return from Olympus also has a framing narration, but one that resembles less a storytelling situation. The movie tells of the return of Hercules to Earth, during which he recalls some of his old labours (e.g., the apples of Hesperides and the freeing of Prometheus). The occasion for telling the stories are the frescoes presenting the Twelve Labours of Hercules seen in his sanctuary on Earth.

The movie *Labyrinth: The Deeds of Theseus* also starts and ends with the same heroes having a dialogue, but these characters belong to the story itself. In the beginning of the movie the centaur Cheiron sends Theseus on a journey and in the end he comforts him after the death of his father. We cannot consider this construction to be a framing narration. However, in the first version of the script written in 1969 the centaur addressed his final speech to a young man and woman, who would probably represent the audience. His words were: “Don’t be sad, kids. It is not easy to be a hero. Theseus has new, even more glorious deeds before him. He will find consolation in them” (Simukov 1969–1970, 20). Such a speech might be understood as an address to a listener by a storyteller, but it does not appear in the final version of the movie.

Introduction of the Main Hero

Propp states that in the beginning of a fairy tale we usually meet a young and an old character, a “herald” in Campbell’s terms (2004, 47): “Characters of the older generation usually take care of sending the hero away from home; the younger generation leaves home, in various forms and with different kinds of motivation” (Propp 2012, 152). The scene of *The Argonauts* presented above contains a sort of intergenerational meeting, but the episode does not belong to the story itself.

We can find a more traditional beginning in *Labyrinth: The Deeds of Theseus*. As was mentioned above, the movie starts with a dialogue between the old centaur Cheiron and Theseus. Cheiron explains that he has given to the young man all the knowledge he possesses, and he shows a stone with a sword and sandals hidden underneath. In raising the stone Theseus fulfils his first task and he obtains the hidden objects. The centaur makes a farewell speech, advising Theseus to use his strength only for good and promising him a life full of great deeds. He sends the adolescent to Athens and tells him that Aegeus is his father. This dialogue, along with the fulfilling of the first task and the taking the objects, starts the narrative proper.

The choice of a centaur for this scene is interesting. The most obvious source of the myth for Simukov and Snezhko-Blotskaia, the mythology of Kuhn that was written on the basis of Plutarch’s *Theseus*, says that it is the hero’s mother Aethra who shows him the stone and sends him to his father (Kuhn 1954, 183).

A similar situation can be found in Plutarch's text, which was also available to the authors (Plut. *Thes.* 6.2, ed. Markish and Sobolevsky 1961, 7). Cheiron appears as a teacher of Theseus in *Brockhaus and Efron Encyclopaedic Dictionary* (entry by Kurbatov 1901, 763), the most influential such reference work in pre-revolutionary Russia,¹⁷ but there is no scene of farewell there, and the description of the myth is very short. It could be that the authors of the animation used few sources and decided to choose Cheiron to make the ancient Greek setting more clear for the viewer. The beginning of the screenplay by Simukov seems to confirm this idea:

Oak groves in ancient Attica... A stream curiously winding near a rocky road, intricate piles of rocks, in short the landscape that in the imagination of the ancient Greeks was inhabited by fairy-tale creatures: nymphs, satyrs, as well as beings half human and half horse who entered mythology under the name of centaurs [...]. And also now, among the trees we hear the clatter of hoofs, light footsteps, and before us there are two persons: the old grey-haired centaur Cheiron and a handsome youth, striding easily next to the centaur (Simukov 1969–1970, 2).

A centaur was also a proper teacher figure as proves Edith Hall in this volume (301–326). On the other hand, the scene of the farewell, though it belongs to the myth, is built on a typical fairy-tale pattern and Simiukov includes it in the script. At the same time, Plutarch's and Kuhn's telling of this scene contains an episode of a failure (or a refusal) to follow advice, also typical for fairy tales: Aethra tells her son to go to Athens by sea, the safer way, but Theseus ignores her entreaty and takes a more dangerous way. A prohibition and its violation is also a necessary element of a fairy tale (Propp 2012, 153), however this episode is omitted in the case of the animation under consideration.

The hero of the last animation, Perseus, does not meet an old man, but he does encounter Hermes, who speaks with the adolescent about the task of getting the head of the Gorgon Medusa. The god is a typical Campbell "herald" mentioned above, but he may be also interpreted as an omniscient elder. However, Perseus has already been sent to fulfil the task and the god only gives him clues how to do it, he does not initiate the hero's journey. He does nonetheless give necessary information for us who watch the movie and for whom the story is just beginning.

¹⁷ More on Antiquity in *Brockhaus and Efron Encyclopaedic Dictionary* see Filimonov (2012).

The Journey of the Hero

According to Propp, “the fantastical tale’s composition is defined by the presence of two kingdoms” (2012, 157) and the main hero leaves his land and goes to some unknown, distant land. This other kingdom may represent a land behind the border of the human world and stay for a type of Underworld. The journey to this land is full of danger, which gives the hero a possibility to show his strength. The journey is central to Campbell’s understanding of myth as being also a path of initiation (2004, 45–233).

Theseus as well as Jason and the Argonauts sail to distant lands. Colchis presumably is the most magical land in the myths under consideration, though the animators depict it as the familiar Georgian landscape, with recognizable mountains and architecture, adding such elements as traditional Georgian dress and furniture. The connection of the myth with the Georgian landscape was probably an additional motivation for including this story into the series, because from this point of view the myth was Soviets’ “own”, “native” myth.

A journey to Crete is presented in the movie about Theseus. The island is painted in black, brown, and red colours. After it is announced that a sailor is approaching Crete, we see a red radiance that casts light on the ship (08:57).¹⁸ Only then does the perspective change and we notice the island itself, presented as a small mountainous landscape with a castle at the top. The castle is drawn as a cube-shaped monumental building with columns inside. It resembles a Constructivist building. However, a structure made of huge blocks is also associated with Minoan architecture. The interiors of the palace are painted in the same range of colours, adding more grey tones of concrete. It looks like a dark building, though it has open spaces and joyful plant ornaments on the walls or the famous frescoes of the Crete palace.

The Labyrinth is situated underneath the palace being the only underground place in the cartoons. Its entrance is depicted as a portal looking like a gigantic head in the style of the entrance to the Temple of Moloch in the famous movie *Cabiria* (1914) by Giovanni Pastrone. The Labyrinth is dark. It is a multi-level space, separated by iron barriers with a huge double-bitted axe, the labrys. Thus, the Labyrinth is situated in the human world and symbolizes the evil created by man. It has a strong political connotation. The double axe known from the Minoan culture was in the twentieth century used as a symbol of Greek fascism (the National Youth Organization of the Metaxas regime) and of Italian post-war neo-fascist organization Ordine Nuovo. The red lights are similar to representations of the fires of war. Earlier, in the scene in Athens where youths are sent as an offering, we see an old woman crying over her son. She is drawn in a way typical of the representation of soldiers’ mothers on Soviet WW2

¹⁸ For the convenience of the reader, I note the time that film passages begin in the format (minute: second).

posters or in the movies after the war. Including antifascist propaganda in fairy-tale movies was common for early Rou productions (*Vasilisa Prekrasnaia* [Vasilisa the Beautiful, 1939]; *Kashchei Bessmertnyi* [Kashchei the Immortal, 1944]). In an even more obvious way it is present in *The Return from Olympus* where Hydra metamorphoses into a swastika and the Stympthalian Birds into fighter planes. A black man beaten by a soldier alludes to Prometheus bound, referring thus to anti-war and anti-colonial discourse, especially topical in the context of the Vietnam War.

The Gorgon Medusa in *Perseus* is said to live in a magical land too. Firstly, we see her island as a small, dark, and rocky land. When the hero flies to it, the island is brownish-red and evidently has a volcanic origin (09:31). Among the mountains, Perseus sees dead heroes that have been transformed into grey stone figures. However, when the young man finds Medusa, she is lying on a sandy beach sunbathing, looking like a beautiful girl. This representation reveals the Gorgon as a human, and the island as a kind of resort, at least for Gorgons.

Gift Givers and Magical Objects

Another important element of a fairy tale is the presence of magical objects that help the hero to triumph (Propp 2012, 158). In the beginning of the *Perseus* we see the main hero walking along a road. Suddenly he sees a bird drowning in a lake. He helps the bird, falling into the water himself. He strokes the bird and lets it fly away. Doing a favour to an animal in need is very typical for a fairy tale. It is one of the possibilities for the hero to encounter a “donor”, one who will give a magical object to the hero (159). The animal may ask the hero to free it (a pike, a golden fish, etc.), or the hero may help it by his own initiative, and then have the favour returned. The bird in our animation does not perform the donor function. It never appears in the movie again. The animators use this episode only to display the kindness and empathy of the main character. However, already in the next scene Perseus does receive magical objects from a different person, and the fairy-tale scenario returns.

Perseus is granted a sharp sword and a polished shield by Hermes and is sent to the Graeae to obtain winged sandals (*talaria*) and a “magic bag” (*kibisis*). According to other versions of the myth, the hero encounters further persons and receives other magical objects. For example, in Kuhn’s mythology he receives the shield from Athena (as in Lucan’s *Pharsalia* 662), and the Graeae only show him the way to the Nymphs, who give him the winged sandals and the *kibisis*, as well as the helmet of Hades (1954, 103–104). Kuhn’s description of the Nymphs corresponds with the version of Pseudo-Apollodorus (*Bibliotheca* 2.4.2–3). In the *Brockhaus and Efron Encyclopaedic Dictionary* (entry by Nikolai Obnorsky 1898, 355) as well as in a note to the Russian translation of Pseudo-Apollodorus (*Bibliotheca* 2.4) by Vladimir Borukhovich (Apollodor 1972, 145, n. 7) the helmet is called the “cap of invisibility” (*shapka-nevidimka*), a popular object in

East-Slavic fairy tales. Its presence would have made the narration even more akin to a fairy tale, however Perseus is not presented with this artefact in the movie.

The second gift-givers of the animation *Perseus*, the Graeae, are depicted in the style of fable characters, similar to the bony and grey-haired Baba Yaga. At variance with the myth, they are presented as grateful donors. Perseus, counter to the usual version of the myth (Kuhn 1954, 103–104) and the advice of Hermes in the animation, does not cheat the ladies nor does he steal their only eye. In contrast, he helps them to find the eye (06:00) and even brings them flowers as a sign of gratitude (07:50). Thus, Perseus is not a “mischievous fellow”, as would be typical for a fable. He is rather an ideal Soviet man, kind to the elderly, consciously following moral values. At the beginning of the animation he states: “My mother told me that we should believe in good” (01:55). Perseus echoes a hero that was sought in Soviet children’s literature of the 1970s. Compare the description of Ben Hellman in his portrayal of Soviet literature of the period:

Voices were raised for a return to the principles of socialist realism, as when in 1969 the critic Vladimir Nikolaev asked for strong-willed, combative and idealistic heroes, inspired by civic awareness, instead of all the apolitical dreamers and weak outsiders that threatened to take over children’s literature. (Hellman 2013, 535)

While watching the cinematic fables of Rou, it is difficult to deny that these folk heroes resemble an ideal communist of Socialist Realism. Kira Paramonova emphasizes that the director used to deliberately destroy some of the magical objects (the cap of invisibility is stolen by a kite, the magic carpet falls into an abyss), in order to show that “in the end heroes overcame the enemy not due to fairy-tale wonders, but thanks to their courage, steadfastness, wit and friendship” (1979, 44). Perhaps this was the reason for omitting the cap of invisibility in Snezhko-Blotskaia’s movie?

Saving a Girl and a Subsequent Marriage

An ideal finale for a good fairy tale is “a marriage and crowning of the hero” (Propp 2012, 171–172). Rescuing an unfortunate person may be even the main reason for the hero’s adventures. The myths of Perseus, Theseus, and Jason also contain the love motif, and it is emphasized in the movies. Not all these stories end with weddings, not all the protagonists were happy in the later stages of their lives, but the viewer does not know this on the basis of these animations alone. In the Snezhko-Blotskaia movie, Medea is taken as a bride to her husband’s land and Jason says nothing about their future life together as he tells his story as an

old man.¹⁹ Ariadne is stolen back by Dionysus and does not come to Athens, but still she is in love with Theseus and it is mutual. However, these two women were helpers, not an object saved by a hero. A proper love story we can find in the myth of Perseus and Andromeda.

Perseus sees a chained girl from above as he flies over Ethiopia. “A girl! She is chained to a rock!” the youth cries. In contrast to typical mythological version, Hermes follows the hero in his adventures and is present in this scene. The god acts as the voice of reason and responds: “This is no time to think about girls!” (15:37). Nevertheless, Perseus unchains the girl and she tells him that she was shackled at the gods’ command to save the land of her father from a sea monster. Andromeda does not mention Cassiopeia and the preceding events known from Greek mythology. She agrees with her role as an offering and bears no resentment against her father. She resembles Nasten’ka from Rou’s *Morozko* [Jack Frost] fairy tale (1964), who, being left in a frozen winter forest, makes no complaint (Paramonova 1979, 88–89). As Balina and Beumers put it in the context of Soviet filmed fables of the 1960s, “[m]ost important [...] is the stress on intrinsically Russian moral values of self-sacrifice, humility, and meekness to achieve a victory over evil forces” (2016, 132). Such features of Andromeda are appreciated by the male hero and he falls in love and saves the girl from the monster. Perseus uses the last glance of Medusa’s head to stone Cetus. The young man gently proposes to Andromeda that she go with him. His last words to Hermes are: “I have found my happiness”. The god answers: “Farewell. Love is not my province” (17:58). Thus, the movie transforms into a typical love story. Romantic music starts. Perseus kneels to put one of the winged sandals on the girl’s leg. She soars up into the sky first and Perseus teaches her to fly holding her by hand. The picture resembles the famous Marc Chagall painting *The Promenade* (1918). It is interesting that this film was finished in the middle of June 1973, at the same time when Chagall had come to visit the USSR for the first time since 1922. He held an exhibition at the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow and reappeared on the country’s art scene. In the end Perseus and Andromeda flew even further and became constellations in outer space, combining pride of contemporary space achievements (flight into cosmos)²⁰ with the Greeks’ knowledge of the stars and constellations.

¹⁹ Contrary to the version of Uspensky, according to which Jason firstly thinks that he meets his and Medea’s children (1941, 100).

²⁰ Similar motif was also present in one of the version of scenarios for the movie *Prometheus*, where space achievements are understood as continuation of the gift of Prometheus (Snezhko-Blotskaia and Simukov 1973, 73).

The Beasts

The most important feature of a fairy tale is the presence of a fantastical beast that must be defeated by the hero. Animation allows the presentation of the most unthinkable creatures. Already in the first movie of the series, *The Return from Olympus*, we see Nereus, the old man of the sea, who may change his shape. In the movie, we see him as an old man of green colour with webbed toes, but being caught by Hercules he transforms into a huge blue-red fish, a green snake, a big bird, and again into a man (06:14). In my opinion, the episode of Nereus may have been chosen purely due to the possibility to show his transformations through animation.

I have also mentioned above some other mythical creatures present in the animations: the Nymphs, the centaur Cheiron, the Hydra, the Stymphalian Birds, the Graeae, the Gorgon Medusa, the sea monster Cetus, the Minotaur. There are also the Crommyonian Sow, the Sirens, and the dragon guarding the Golden Fleece. Most of them have iconic representations in art and these were used by the animators to some extent. However, some of the beasts were radically modernized. The most striking example is the transformation of the Stymphalian Birds and the Hydra into military Nazi symbols in the first movie of the series. At this point I would like to look at ways that fantasy creatures are depicted and to find possible connections with the cultural context of the times of the animations. “Monsters are our children”, repeats Susan Deacy after Jeffrey Jerome Cohen in the chapter in the present volume, exploring connections between culture and monsters that are created by it (177).

The most notable feature of the animated Soviet monsters, in my opinion, is their “un-scariness”. The monsters are not frightening. They are big, they are monstrous, and they produce loud sounds, but they are not as scary as they might be. It was a principle of Rou to show evil in his film tales in such a way that it would cause laughter together with fear (Paramonova 1979, 13). It seems that the animations also follow this rule. As a result, some of them (*Perseus*, *The Argonauts*) achieved a 0+ age categorization on the *Kinopoisk* database.²¹

Another characteristic of the beasts in the movies under discussion is that many of them are dragon-like figures. These are the Hydra in *The Return from Olympus* (its first appearance is made at 15:54), the dragon that guards the Golden Fleece in *The Argonauts* (13:51), the sea monster Cetus (16:46), and the Gorgon (02:40) in *Perseus*. The dragon is the most popular evil beast for many mythological traditions, Slavic mythology included. In East-Slavic folklore the dragon is called *Zmei Gorynych* (literally the ‘snake from mountains’), which emphasizes its snake-like nature. The dragon is a chthonic figure and is connected with the four elements of fire, water, earth, and air (also rain and the

²¹ This is an equivalent of IMDb for Russian-language cinema – see the entry on *Argonavty* and the entry on *Persei*.

tempest), and originally it was the lord thereof (Propp 2015, 348; Ivanov 1991a, 1991b).

The dragon is also often present in epic narratives, especially in East Slavic traditions. Propp says that in the Russian epic it may be understood as an enemy of the Motherland, being a typical mythical enemy (2015, 344). This feature was used by Rou for presenting a fairy-tale dragon in *Vasilisa the Beautiful* or the army of Kashchei the Immortal. The dragon from the animation *Mezha* [The Border, 1967] by Viacheslav Kotionochkin is an enemy of the simple folk, it demolishes their land and houses and upturns the usual order of life. It is called a *basurman* (an adherent of a different creed, which usually was understood as ‘Muslim’) and it flies with enormous speed like an aircraft. It acts together with the tsar and his army. Snezhko-Blotskaia also made a movie about a dragon earlier, on the base of a Burmese folktale (*Dragon*, 1961). The dragon here is depicted in the Chinese style, but he also represents an authority that oppresses people for hundreds of years through insufferable taxes. Let us finally observe that the fight with a dragon has a strong tradition in the Christian religion, though this was omitted in Soviet-era representations.

Perseus also contains allusions to the Russian *bylina* (a traditional East Slavic oral epic poem) in the depiction of a flying monster. The appearance of the Gorgon is preceded by black-brown clouds that darken the screen (02:45). We then see a flying, fire-breathing person. Let us compare with a fragment from a *bylina*:

Как в ту пору, в то время
Ветра нет, тучу наднесло,
Тучи нет, а только дождь дождит,
Дождя-то нет, искры сыпятся, –
Летит Змиище-Горынище,
О двенадцати змия о хоботах,
Хочет змия его с конем сожечь. (Propp 2015, 349)

At that moment, at that time
There is no wind, a cloud was carried past,
There is no cloud, but the rain rains,
There is no rain, sparks are pouring.
The great dragon is flying – Gorynishche
Besides the dragon with twelve trunks.
The dragon wants to burn him and his horse.²² (Propp 2012, 216)

²² The original version is quoted by Propp on the base of the collection of Russian songs edited by Pavel Rybnikov. The translation of Propp’s volume is made by Sibelan Forrester.

Medusa flies over the city and we see compositions of fossilized men and women left in her wake. However, they look beautiful, akin to ancient statues. Hermes also remarks that Medusa believes she gives immortality to people through her acts. She takes on even more human features when we see her sunbathing as was mentioned above. Sleeping on the beach, using her wings as an umbrella, she resembles images of a beautiful Medusa in the style of the *Medusa Rondanini*. In this case, it would be her womanly power that makes men afraid.²³ “Yet it is less the horror than the grace / which turns the gazer’s spirit into stone”, to follow famous Shelley’s words (1824, 139). This aspect is underlined in her speech to Perseus. Once awoken, she tries to get the youth’s attention and flirts with him:

‘Why don’t you look at me, my boy? I want to admire your face. Look at me. You are too nervous, my dear. Look at me. The best condition is complete rest. Look at me. Do you want to become immortal? Look at me.’ (10:51)

Perseus does look at her, but only by means of his shield. Here, the beautiful face of the evil woman framed by the oval of the shield-mirror echoes the Wicked Queen from *Snow White* (made by Disney or Soyuzmultfilm²⁴). The young man fights with Medusa in the air, on the sea, and on land, which brings us again to the dragon character of the beast. She frightens Perseus with all the heads of her snakes, being in this sense a multi-headed monster.

Another dragon in the same movie is the sea monster Cetus. We first see the monster coming from the water akin to a huge serpent (16:55). Then, it stands on two legs and, due to its great size and figure, resembles Godzilla from Ishirō Honda’s movie (1954). It is especially similar to the Japanese prototype before it is turned to stone by Medusa’s glance (17:15). In this fight, Medusa’s head acts again together with all her nine snakes. So, we see a dragon killing a dragon. This solution is contrary to the popular version of the myth, where Perseus slays the monster with a sword and uses the head of Medusa to kill Phineus and company, who did not want him to marry Andromeda (Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 2.4.3–4). In the entry by Obnorsky in *Brockhaus and Efron Encyclopaedic Dictionary* (1898, 355) Perseus uses Medusa’s head to kill the sea monster, Phineus and his friends, and also Polydectes and his guests. The movie has a minimum of terrifying episodes from this list, which is natural for the animations addressed for children. It is worth adding that Perseus holding Medusa’s head in the animation imitates the great sculpture (1545–1554) of Benvenuto Cellini.

²³ For more on this and other reasons for fearing Medusa see Kaplan (2013, 63–78).

²⁴ In the USSR the film adaptation was based on Pushkin’s variant of the fairy tale *Skazka o mērtvoi tsarevne i semi bogatyriakh* [The Tale of the Dead Princess and the Seven Knights], dir. Ivan Ivanov-Vano (1951).

Slavic dragons often have three (six, or nine) heads, which makes them similar to the many-headed Hydra (usually with nine heads, but sometimes fifty or a hundred). In *The Return from Olympus* we see the Hydra as first a one-headed snake, which transforms into a three-headed crawling dragon (15:54), which is then to be transformed into a four-headed swastika inside the ruins of a Greek temple. Before the moment of change, the sky is again covered with clouds, resembling dragon as well as war motifs. The allusion reaches its peak with a symbolical transformation. A comparison between the Nazi swastika and a serpent is common in Soviet antifascist posters. The very popular slogan *Smert' fashistskoi gadine!*, known as “Death to the Fascist Monster!”, should be rather translated as “Death to the Fascist Reptile!”, where the term for reptile (*gad, gadina*) refers to the serpent from the Garden of Eden, as well as a monster or a dragon. The slogan appeared on posters with snake-swastikas, for example on one made by Aleksei Kokorekin in 1941 with the same title (Bonelli 1997, 221).

In *Perseus*, the dragon guarding the Golden Fleece has no war connotations. It is a typical dragon of fable that guards a treasure. It is huge with big white teeth and blue eyes, and it tries to bite Jason like an animal. It is very similar to a dog, especially when Medea comes with a bunch of poppies and sprinkles it with the flowers' latex. The dragon calms down and falls asleep like a pet (13:55).

Even more animal features we see in the last monster to be described in this chapter, the Minotaur from Theseus' cartoon. Firstly, we hear about him from Aegeus who despairs of sending young men as an offering to the beast. Afterwards, already on Crete, we hear his roar and see the fear of Ariadne. The girl appeals to heaven to send somebody who could kill the monster. We see the Minotaur only the third time. In montage his image alternates with the figure of a scared and running girl, which makes him more terrifying according to the theory of the Russian filmmaker Lev Kuleshov.²⁵ However, the creature himself is not so frightening. He looks like a man with a bull's head. He has huge white fangs and a red mouth, formed into a clownish smiling style. The head of the Minotaur resembles a mask put on an ordinary human. In the next sequence, we see him running after the girl, and now we can notice that the Minotaur is huge and dangerous. Theseus fights with him like a toreador. When the Minotaur attacks, he raises his paws, akin to a wolf from an animated fairy tale. Afterwards the monster and Theseus wrestle. One of the other Athenians gives a weapon to Theseus. The Minotaur loses because his horns get stuck in the double axe of the Labyrinth. Theseus takes advantage of this moment and strikes him with a dagger. The Minotaur roars like a wounded wolf and falls, scratching the wall with his claws.

²⁵ The theory of montage developed by Kuleshov in the 1910s and 1920s attached great significance to the sequence of shots, when one shot changes the perception of the following shot in the mind of the viewer. The Kuleshov effect had a great influence on early Soviet cinema.

Thus, the Minotaur is shown as a monster, an animal, and a man. As it is typical for many monsters, initially he is unknown. There are stories about him, we may hear his voice, but we may see him only with time. He lives under the palace, and this is the place that is evil. We see fascist symbols here, it is dark and frightening. The Minotaur itself acts like an animal: a bull (chasing or being chased) and a wolf (frightening and suffering). This wolf once again comes from a fairy tale. However, there is a moment in the movie when we may see that the Minotaur is but a tool used by other agents. In the dialogue between Ariadne and Minos (09:50) the king calls him “our support” and says that they need the Minotaur because he provides security for their country; he makes everybody afraid of them. Thus, the Minotaur is also a victim in this story, though this is not highlighted in the animation. Theseus has no doubts about killing him, and the young man is perceived as a hero who saves a nation or even nations, a hero to be imitated.

Conclusions

To go back to the beginning of this chapter where I quoted the review of the *Perseus* film by Margaret Ford, I would like to note that it is presently the only review of a movie from the series printed outside the USSR known to me. Internal discussions on the movies and scripts during their production confirm that the studio highly appreciated *Perseus*. Fyodor Khitruk, a famous Russian animation director known for his adaptation of Winnie-the-Pooh stories, stated during a discussion in Soyuzmultfilm in 1973 that he had concerns about the style and the dialogues of the series, but it was the *Perseus* movie that had persuaded him that those movies might succeed (Snezhko-Blotskaia and Simukov 1973, 81). Perhaps this was the only movie of the series that was exported abroad.

The late appearance of myths on the Soviet screen and the peculiarities of the movies confirm the complex attitude to Antiquity in the USSR. The use of the old-style literary language proves the understanding of Greek culture as elevated and distant from contemporary life. On the other hand, references to the folktale tradition make the mythology more familiar and nativized for the creators and for the audience. Allusions to concurrent ideological propaganda may make an understanding of the movies easier, bringing them within the cultural context of the USSR. At the same time, all these advantages were hardly to be appreciated for audiences outside the Soviet Union.

War was one of the most popular themes for Soviet cinema over its existence. It also entered the fairy-tale universe from the first movies of the series. A hero symbolizing a nation fought with a beast that embodied that nation's enemy. Such an understanding was especially important in a wartime or post-war period. War references gave a possibility to reveal the greatness of the heroism of a human being. Quite naturally it entered the animated world of the Greek myths.

Hercules, Jason, and Theseus are warriors, who intently look for monsters to defeat. Hercules, who was the first to appear on Soviet screens, is openly depicted as the brave hero (*bogatyř*) of Russian *byliny*. He shares the values of peasants and looks like them. On his way to Olympus he notices the Hydra with the words: “And there! Look! It still moves!” (16:03). He behaves like a person returning from war, who cannot readapt to peacetime life.²⁶

The images of the beasts in these animations usually bear a symbolical meaning. Their characters are not developed, we do not know their back story. Usually, they are just monsters to be defeated, and it is the image of a dragon that is used most often to represent a beast. However, the monsters in the animations are not frightening. These ancient dragons had been vanquished even before the Slavic dragons. Neither the Greek heroes nor the viewers are afraid of them. We may even feel pity for the beasts, who look like pretty women or familiar animals.

At first sight the ancient myths in the animations are simplified and the mythological messages are clear and openly pronounced. However, even in these simple stories, where many threads are omitted, there are plenty of allusions and connotations, on the visual or verbal side of the movie. These animations were shown on Soviet television channels until the very end of the Soviet Union. Very often they were the first encounter that child viewers had with Greek mythology. Their epic style narration assumed heroism of the characters and glorious victory. Fairy-tale conventions made their apprehension easier. The stories do not represent a variability of plots or interpretations of ancient myths, they do not pose unsolvable tragic questions, but they do make the stories connected with tales known from the earliest childhood.

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²⁶ For more see in my paper, Paulouskaya (2017).

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AMANDA POTTER

Bringing Classical Monsters to Life on BBC Children's Television: Gorgons, Minotaurs, and Sirens in *Doctor Who*, *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, and *Atlantis*

My own childhood was filled with monsters from the mythological past and the imagined future. Growing up in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s I collected Ladybird books, inexpensive pocket-sized hardback children's books, and one of my favourites was *Famous Legends Book 1* (Preshous and Ayton 1975), featuring pictures of the Minotaur and the head of Medusa on the cover. The monsters were far more interesting than the rather dull and interchangeable heroes, Theseus and Perseus, pictured alongside the monsters inside the book. I went to the swimming pool once a week and my treat after swimming was a packet of *Monster Munch* from the vending machine, the salty corn snacks in the shape of monsters. As a promotion for *Clash of the Titans* (1981) the packets featured key facts about one of the monsters from the film. I remember always hoping that I would get a packet with a monster other than the Kraken, and generally being disappointed. I watched *Doctor Who* with Tom Baker every week, not literally from "behind the sofa",¹ although as a young child I found the music quite scary, and the Daleks were frightening and attractive at the same time. I drew and sent the Doctor a picture of my own imagined monster, receiving a nice card back from the BBC (writing as the Doctor) thanking me for my artwork. Today a knitted Dalek surveys my living room from its strategic position on top of the drinks cabinet.

Through my research into viewer reception of Greek myth on television I caught glimpses of the mythical childhoods of others. Before watching episodes of *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995–2001) and *Charmed* (1998–2006) featuring Pandora's Box (respectively: "Cradle of Hope", s1e4, 1995, and "Little Box of Horrors", s7e18, 2005), I asked participants to explain what they knew about the story of Pandora, and this evoked early memories of nasty, biting, winged creatures emerging from a box on the pages of children's story books.

¹ A popular cliché about *Doctor Who* is that young viewers watched from "behind the sofa" to avoid the more frightening scenes, cf. Leith (2008) and Berry (2013).

One of the volunteers taking part in my doctoral research project chose to study Classical Civilizations as an undergraduate because as a teenager (age 11–13) she had enjoyed watching *Xena: Warrior Princess* with the heroine fighting for good against a plethora of monsters, both human and supernatural. It is the monsters that we remember, alongside and sometimes over and above the heroes, and classical monsters are still pervasive.

Focusing specifically on how classical monsters are portrayed in the BBC series *The Sarah Jane Adventures* (2007–2011), aimed at children, and *Atlantis* (2013–2015) and New *Doctor Who* Season 6 (2011), aimed at family audiences, I aim to discuss how series creators make these monsters “realistic” by building them into the worlds of the series, and also in many cases also sympathetic and even attractive. They are no longer simply monsters to be killed by the brave but often bland male heroes Theseus, Perseus, Jason, and the rest. Instead viewers are challenged to see the world through the eyes of the monster, a creature with his or her own motivations. If young viewers can understand and sympathize with the monster, rather than treat the monster as the evil “other”, then perhaps they can also grow up to understand and sympathize with other people who might seem different to themselves.²

Introductory Remarks

The mission statement for the BBC, as the UK’s public service broadcaster, is “to enrich people’s lives with programmes and services that inform, educate and entertain” (BBC Values [n.d.]). In the 1960s, the British iconic science fiction series *Doctor Who* was conceived as an educational as well as an entertaining television show for children and families (Tulloch and Alvarado 1983, and Bignell 2007). The series moved away from education as a primary aim as it continued to be aired as a family show until 1989. When it was relaunched by showrunner Russell T. Davies in 2005 and broadcast by the BBC in an early Saturday evening slot it brought entertaining drama (back) to a family audience, with the important aim of “enthraling an eight-year-old child”, rather than educating them (Bell 2008). However, to tie in with the new series (referred to by scholars and fans as *New Who* as opposed to *Classic Who*) the BBC created educational online games linked to the series and to *The Sarah Jane Adventures* to encourage young viewers to learn about science and history through interactive games featuring characters from the series.³ The three BBC television series featuring monsters from Greek mythology included in this chapter, *The*

² On the monster as “other”, cf. Cohen (1996, 7–12).

³ Cf. BBC Bitesize (2014) and BBC Home (2014). Phil Ford, the writer of the episode and of the tie-in novel *Eye of the Gorgon* (2007) also wrote the adventure game series entitled “Doctor Who: The Adventure Games”. *The Gunpowder Plot* adventure game from the games series is discussed by Elizabeth Evans (2013).

Sarah Jane Adventures, *New Doctor Who*, and *Atlantis*, may have been conceived and produced primarily as entertainment. Even if education is not the main purpose of the series, viewers obtain information about classical monsters by watching the series, reading tie-in material online and in books, and playing online games. While the National Curriculum in England (2013) includes Ancient Greece in History Key Stage 2 (taught to pupils aged seven to eleven), and some mythology may be included, for example Greek religion and the Olympian gods and goddesses,⁴ young readers and viewers with an interest in mythology are able to pick up much more information than is available to them through the education system from popular culture, including series like *The Sarah Jane Adventures*.

Learning from Perseus: How to Destroy a Gorgon in *The Sarah Jane Adventures*

The Sarah Jane Adventures was conceived by Russell T. Davies as a *Doctor Who* spin-off series aimed at young viewers, following the appearance of the character of Sarah Jane Smith, played by Elisabeth Sladen, in the *New Doctor Who* episode "School Reunion" (s2e3, 2006), alongside the Tenth Doctor (David Tennant). In the 1970s Sladen as Sarah Jane Smith had been a popular companion to the Third and Fourth Doctors (Jon Pertwee and Tom Baker). In *The Sarah Jane Adventures* she is joined by a cast of young actors who help her to solve mysteries involving aliens. The series was aired on CBBC (Children's BBC, with a core target audience of six- to twelve-year-olds) on a weekday tea time slot. It ran for four seasons from 2007 to 2010, and half of season five was made prior to Sladen's sudden death from cancer in 2011. These episodes were aired in 2011.

The double episode "Eye of the Gorgon" was the second story in the first season and was written by Phil Ford, who also wrote a tie-in book, *Eye of the Gorgon* (2007). This is the only story in the series that features a plotline and characters based on Greek mythology. Other episodes do include historical, rather than mythological content, such as "Lost in Time", set in England across the Tudor, Victorian, and WW2 eras (s4e9–10), "Mona Lisa's Revenge", where the Mona Lisa comes to life (s3e9–10), and "The Eternity Trap", featuring an alchemist called Erasmus (s3e7–8). In "Eye of the Gorgon" the monstrous Gorgons turn out to be aliens, and the series protagonists defeat them by using the knowledge that they accumulate over the course of the episodes. These Gorgons are monstrous, not sympathetic, but they are built into the world of the series and are thus made more believable for young viewers. The episodes also teaches the series young protagonists (and viewers) that the knowledge required

⁴ Online resources for teachers are available including this material, for example at Twinkl [n.d.].

to defeat monsters can be found in a number of places, and monsters can be defeated by ingenuity.

The episodes begin as a potential ghost story; Sarah Jane Smith, a reporter, is investigating sightings of a ghostly nun at an old people's home. She interviews Alzheimer's sufferer Bea, and Bea gives Sarah Jane's adopted son Luke a piece of jewellery she calls "the talisman", and asks him to keep it safe. Bea later reveals that nuns are searching for the talisman, an alien artefact found by her archaeologist husband, and that the nuns are protecting a Gorgon. Back at home, Sarah Jane rather reaches for a book at the top of her bookshelf to search for information about the Gorgons. Her young neighbour Maria is first incredulous:

Maria: A Gorgon, all snakes for hair and turning people to stone by looking at them? It's a fairy story, isn't it?

Sarah Jane: A myth. A Greek myth. There's a big difference. And incidentally, for future reference, Maria, even some fairy tales have a foundation in fact. Here it is.

Maria: [reads from the book] *There were three Gorgons, the hideous daughters of Phorcys the sea god and Ceto.*

Sarah Jane: Stheno, Euryale, and Medusa. That's right. But in some versions of the story there was just one. Medusa. And she wasn't always ugly. She was a beautiful nymph with golden hair, but Poseidon fell in love with her and jealous Athena turned her into a Gorgon.

Maria: Medusa was killed by Perseus as a challenge.

Sarah Jane: The Greeks were always dishing out challenges to each other. I think it must be a man thing. But this one really had to be a tough call. Warrior after warrior had tried to slay the Gorgons, but all of them turned to stone. (s1e3, 00:17:11–00:18:11)

One might expect Sarah Jane to go to her super computer, Mr. Smith, for information about the Gorgon. He had been able to identify the talisman as an alien artefact, and is the main source of information for Sarah Jane and her young friends throughout the series. But by going to an illustrated book of Greek myths and reading this together with Maria, then Sarah Jane is encouraging Maria, and young viewers of the series, that they can find important information from books. Sarah Jane's book draws on the story of Medusa from Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, slightly sanitized for the young audience by missing out the rape of Medusa by Poseidon. More details of the story are included in the tie-in novel, for young viewers who want to learn more about the myth (Ford 2007, 60–66).

At the end of part one Sarah Jane, Luke, and his friend Clyde have all been taken prisoner by the nuns at the abbey. The leader of the nuns, Sister Helena, explains that the nuns have protected the Gorgons for centuries, and now that the Abbess, the last remaining Gorgon, is dying, she needs the talisman to return

home. However, this turns out to be a ruse, and when Sarah Jane returns home with the veiled Abbess and the nuns, the Gorgon's veil is raised and we finally see the scary face of the monster. Rather than having actual snakes for hair, snake-like blue rays of energy come from her eyes and mouth, and as her face is revealed, Maria's father Alan walks in, and he is turned to stone. In part two the real plan of the Gorgon is revealed. The talisman is needed to open up a portal between the Earth and the planet of the Gorgons, so that the Gorgons can come to Earth, and Sarah Jane has been chosen as the new host for the Gorgon currently inside the body of the Abbess.

Continuing on the theme of knowledge gained without the use of computers, Luke and Clyde, who have been locked in the library, find an escape tunnel by reading the history of the abbey. Although Clyde is initially uninterested, as he can "get a history lesson any time I want" (s1e4, 00:03:03) at school, Luke's knowledge of history and the need for escape passages for priests in the sixteenth century provide a practical application. As the boys escape, through a garden of "statues" (previous victims of the Gorgon, reminiscent of the scene outside the castle of the White Witch in the *Narnia* books), Maria is on a quest to save her petrified father. Bea reveals that the talisman can be used to save a person who has been turned to stone, and also helps Maria in another way:

Bea: Would you fetch me my mirror? No, not for me. What do you think I'm going to do, powder my nose while you take on that monster? It's for you.

Maria: For me?

Bea: Whatever do they teach you in school these days? (s1e4, 00:15:46–00:16:00)

On returning to the abbey Maria follows the example set by Perseus, and uses Bea's mirror pointed at the Gorgon's own face to deflect the snakes of energy back on their originator, turning her to stone. Once the Gorgon is dead the nuns are released from the spell which had made them her servants, and Maria uses the talisman to return her father to his human state. Maria had thought that the talisman could also cure Bea of her Alzheimer's, but it cannot do this. It does, however, return her memories of her dead husband, bringing her "peace".

When I screened "Eye of the Gorgon" for young visitors at the Petrie Museum in Bloomsbury in April 2016 alongside a day of Gorgon mask-making for the Easter holidays,⁵ I asked the young viewers (with help from their older companions where necessary) to answer three questions about the episode on post-it notes. The first question was: "Who was the hero of the episode?" Although many respondents chose more than one hero, as the story required

⁵ This was a one-off event that I devised in conjunction with the Petrie Museum Education Department aimed at encouraging families to visit the Museum.

action from more than one character to bring it to a successful conclusion, it was surprising that after Maria, who had seven votes, Bea was the second favourite character to be the hero, with five votes, above Sarah Jane, Luke, and Clyde. An elderly lady with Alzheimer's is perhaps an unlikely hero, however she was the one character who had the knowledge of how to save Maria's father and also to destroy the Gorgon. Young viewers are therefore thinking of the term hero in a broad way, so that a hero need not be the one who takes the action, but can be the one with the knowledge to cause the action to happen.

My second question was used to ask viewers what they liked most about the episode, and answers were varied, but respondents particularly enjoyed the scenes where people were turned to, or turned back from stone. Through the third and final question I asked the viewers to describe the Gorgon. The top answers were "scary" and viewers also mentioned the "snake energy", for example one respondent found the Gorgon to be "scary, but I liked it being an alien and not having snake-like hair". Although most descriptions were negative, such as "ugly" and "evil", other viewers found the Gorgon to be "single-minded" and "cleverly concealed". Suspense built up in the episode was also appreciated, as "what you don't see is meant to scare you more". In conclusion, the young audience at the screening, representative of the target market of the series, enjoyed the episode, and the way that the story of the Gorgon/Medusa was updated and built into a science-fiction/contemporary London world. They were also able to identify with an old, infirm character, and were encouraged to learn more through reading books, something many of them had done already, being familiar with the story of Medusa from books they had previously read.

Sympathetic Minotaurs in *Atlantis* and *Doctor Who*

A Minotaur, based on the mythical monstrous half man, half bull, from the story of Theseus and the Minotaur, appears in the pilot episode of the BBC series *Atlantis*, "The Earth Bull" (s1e1, 2013) and in the *Doctor Who* episode "The God Complex" (s6e11, 2011). The Minotaurs in both episodes are initially portrayed as monsters to be destroyed by the series' protagonists, Jason and the Doctor. However, in death both of the creatures are made sympathetic, subverting the viewer's expectations and problematising our understanding of what it is to be monstrous.

BBC *Atlantis* was a short-lived fantasy series created by British television writing team Johnny Capps, Julian Murphy, and Howard Overman, who had previously worked on the popular *Merlin* series. *Atlantis* was written for a family audience, to fill the Saturday evening BBC One television slot that had been occupied by *Doctor Who* (2005–), *Merlin* (2008–2012), and *Robin Hood* (2006–2009). The premise behind the series is that Jason, a young man from the modern world, goes in search of his father, and after a submarine accident he washes up in the ancient Greek city of Atlantis. Together with new-found friends

Pythagoras and Hercules, Jason goes on a number of adventures, based on events and characters from Greek mythology (including Pandora's Box, the Furies, Circe, and Atalanta) and ancient history/archaeology (bull-leaping and the Pankration, the Olympic sport). Jason's first adventure, in the pilot episode, "The Earth Bull", puts Jason in the position of Theseus as the slayer of the Minotaur.

The main aspects of the well-known story of Theseus and the Minotaur are retained, and transposed from Crete to Atlantis. Pythagoras and Hercules tell Jason that each year seven citizens of Atlantis are chosen by lot before King Minos to become "tributes" to be sacrificed to the Minotaur, in order to appease the gods. These seven citizens replace the seven young men and seven young women that are sent from Athens to Crete each year to be sacrificed to the Minotaur in ancient versions of the story (cf., e.g., Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca: Epitome* 1.7–10; Ov. *Met.* 8.166–182; Plut. *Thes.* 15.1–20.5). After Pythagoras is chosen to be a tribute by drawing a black stone, Jason takes the stone while Pythagoras is asleep, in order to take the place of the young man who befriended him and harboured him from the palace guards who were pursuing him when he first arrived at Atlantis. Jason tells Ariadne, daughter of Minos, that he is not only doing this for Pythagoras as: "I owe him my life", but also because: "The Oracle told me that this is the path I must follow. I believe I'm meant to kill the Minotaur" (s1e1, 00:29:30–00:29:53).

Ariadne helps Jason by providing him with a ball of string to enable him to find his way out of the labyrinth, thus fulfilling her traditional role as helper-maiden to the hero. Although Jason's friends Pythagoras and Hercules join Jason in the caves which form the Minotaur's maze-like home, like Theseus, Jason faces the Minotaur alone. Tension is built as the three friends, together with the other sacrifices, wander through the dark and labyrinthine series of caves filled with the bones of the Minotaur's former victims. When we finally see the Minotaur the creature towers above Jason, a terrifying CGI (computer-generated imagery) monster.

Both Jason and Theseus actively seek out the Minotaur to destroy it, but while in ancient versions of the story the reader's sympathy is all with the hero, and not with the Minotaur, monstrous progeny of Pasiphaë and bull, in *Atlantis* we find that the Minotaur is a man and not a monster. Saving his fellow tributes, Jason drives a sword through the body of the beast, and at the moment of death the Minotaur reverts to human form. The dying man thanks Jason for lifting the curse of the gods that had condemned him to a life as the monstrous Minotaur, after he had betrayed Jason's father. He also reveals to Jason that he has "a great destiny" (00:41:40), but he dies before revealing any more information. The man who was the Minotaur can be linked with the Oracle as a positive repentant character who knows more about Jason's origins than Jason does himself, and points Jason on the path to greatness, as the true heir of Atlantis. And by making the Minotaur a cursed man, series creators avoid the salacious origin story of the

Minotaur from ancient sources, inappropriate for a young audience of a family-oriented television series.

The Minotaur in *Doctor Who* episode “The God Complex” (s6e11) is a monster removed from its ancient Greek mythological setting, but familiar elements from the story of Theseus and the Minotaur remain. The Eleventh Doctor (Matt Smith) and companions Amy and Rory are trapped in a maze-like hotel in space, where fellow residents are being killed by a Minotaur, which feeds on their belief in a religion, luck, or faith in another individual. As in “The Earth Bull”, tension is built for viewers as we do not see the full shape of the Minotaur until late in the episode, and when we do see the Minotaur he is a massive and frightening creature with horns and hooves. It was the maze-like setting of the episode suggested by showrunner Steven Moffat that inspired episode writer Toby Whithouse to use a version of the Minotaur as the monster (Whithouse 2011). Moffat and team then worked with designers to use prosthetics to create “an alien which is Minotaur-ish and possibly inspired the myth of the Minotaur” (Hickman 2011, 130).

Trapped in the hotel, the victims of this Minotaur are like the tributes in the Labyrinth. The “guests” have been transported to the hotel because they have strong belief systems, in Islam (Rita), in luck (Joe), and in conspiracy theories (Howie). One by one the hotel guests start to utter the words “Praise Him”, before finally succumbing to the monster. The Doctor realizes that his companion Amy is at risk from the Minotaur, because of her strong belief in the Doctor himself, since she first met him as a little girl. The Doctor tells Amy:

Forget your faith in me. I took you with me because I was vain. Because I wanted to be adored. Look at you. Glorious Pond, the girl who waited for me. I’m not a hero. I really am just a mad man in a box. (s6e11, 00:38:00–00:38:42)

Without Amy’s faith in the Doctor to feed on, the Minotaur is given the “space to die” (00:40:06) in the Doctor’s arms. Amy asks the Doctor to translate the Minotaur’s words, and as orchestral music accompanies the moving death scene, the Doctor says:

Doctor (translating): An ancient creature, drenched in the blood of the innocent, drifting in space through an endless, shifting maze. For such a creature, death would be a gift.

Doctor: Then accept it, and sleep well.

Doctor (translating): I wasn’t talking about myself. (s6e11, 00:41:39–00:42:15)

The Minotaur and the Doctor are revealed as doubles. Both are ancient creatures, both travel through space, and both have caused the deaths of others. Earlier in the episode Rita, a likeable and courageous resident of the hotel who succumbs

to the Minotaur through her faith in Islam, tells the Doctor that he has “a god complex” (29:41:00), setting himself up as the one who must save others. But the Doctor's god complex, like the god complex of the Minotaur, can cause harm. The end of the episode is an emotional one: we sympathize with both the Minotaur and the Doctor, as well as better understanding the Doctor's flaws. Contributors to online research I conducted on the episode found the Minotaur to be “an oddly sympathetic creature”, “just as much a prisoner as the rest of the characters”, and “poor creature, I felt bad for it”.⁶ A young fan of *Doctor Who* admitted that he was moved to tears at the Minotaur's death.

This was the second episode in season six of the New *Doctor Who* series to feature a monster from Greek mythology (the Siren in “The Black Spot”, s6e3, 2011, is discussed below), when monsters prior to and after these episodes have been drawn from Classic *Doctor Who*, such as Daleks and Cybermen, or were newly created for New *Who*, such as the Weeping Angels and the Ood, or from other genres, such as vampires, robots, and dinosaurs.⁷ Whithouse, the writer of “The God Complex”, draws on past episodes of *Doctor Who* as well as Greek mythology. In “The God Complex” the Doctor describes the “alien Minotaur” (00:40:34) as a “distant cousin of the Nimon” (00:40:42), a race of alien Minotaurs that appeared in “The Horns of Nimon”, a *Doctor Who* serial from 1979 (s17 serial 5).⁸ “The Horns of Nimon” reworks the story of Theseus and the Minotaur in an outer-space setting, where the monstrous Nimon feed on the life force of their victims, and are stopped from invading by young tribute Seth (playing the role of Theseus) with the help of Doctor and his companion Romana. There is no viewer sympathy invoked for these creatures, who aim to take over a new world and will feed on its inhabitants. In “The God Complex” the Doctor explains to his companions (and viewers):

Doctor: [The Nimon] descend on planets and set themselves up as gods to be worshipped. Which is fine, until the inhabitants get all secular and advanced enough to build bonkers prisons.

Rory: Correction. Prisons in space.

Amy: Where are the guards?

Doctor: No need for any. It's all automated. It drifts through space, snatching people with belief systems and converts their faith into food for the creature. (s6e11, 00:40:43–00:41:07)

⁶ My online questionnaire can be found at <<https://surveymonkey.com/r/H8KHXY>> (accessed March 6, 2020).

⁷ For more information on New *Who* monsters and their origins, cf. Britton (2013); Richards (2014); and BBC One [n.d.].

⁸ On “The Horns of Nimon” as a reworking of Greek mythology, cf. Rafer (2007); Keen (2010); Harvey (2010); and Potter (2018).

In “The Horns of Nimon” and “The God Complex” the existence of alien Minotaurs hints that the Minotaur from Greek mythology could have been inspired by an alien being, in the same way that in *The Sarah Jane Adventures* the viewer learns that the Gorgons from Greek mythology were aliens. This removes the unchild-friendly origin story of the Minotaur and makes the existence of the Minotaur believable within the world of *Doctor Who*, where aliens exist. The sympathy viewers are encouraged to feel for the Minotaur in “The God Complex” is an innovation, however, as we are not encouraged to sympathize with the Nimon or the Gorgon.

I feature the clips of the dying Minotaur from “The Earth Bull” and “The God Complex” in a course on Greek mythology on film and television that I teach at various schools for a UK charity, the Brilliant Club, to young students aged twelve to seventeen. The students read translations of the passages from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (8.166–182) and Apollodorus’ *Bibliotheka* (*Epitome* 1.7–10), and are encouraged to compare the treatment of the hero and the Minotaur in the various texts. Although some of the students express a preference for a less complicated story where monsters are simply monsters to be killed by the hero, most appreciate the more nuanced depictions of the Minotaur, where the relationship between the monster and hero is more complex and thought-provoking. While Jack Donnelly as Jason and Matt Smith as the Doctor are both young actors, only a few years older than young viewers of the series, making it easy for these young viewers to relate to their characters, viewers are also able to relate to and sympathize with the aged monsters.

Female Monsters Get a Makeover: The Siren in *Doctor Who* and Medusa in *Atlantis*

Female monsters abound in Greek mythology, including Scylla, Charybdis, Harpies, Sirens, and Medusa, existing as antagonists to the male heroes who must avoid or destroy them. Many female characters who are not physically monstrous are also portrayed ambivalently, such as the Amazons, the Lemnian women, and Pandora, so that we might find, like John Stephens and Robyn McCallum, that “the metanarratives of classical mythology are inherently sexist” (1998, 84) and this sexism pervades modern retellings and so “myth may well remain unrecuperable as part of children’s experience of culture” (10). Even where ancient authors induce sympathy for the female monster from readers, for example Ovid’s narration of Medusa’s rape by Poseidon in the temple of Athena (*Ov. Met.* 4.794–804), it is the male hero who we are ultimately expected to relate to. Many modern storybook retellings of Greek myths for children retain the misogynism of ancient sources,⁹ but in some cases television provides an

⁹ Cf., e.g., the story of Pandora in Williams (1996).

alternative, or even feminist view.¹⁰ In *Atlantis* and the *Doctor Who* episode "The Curse of the Black Spot" (s6e3, 2011) we are presented with positive, if not feminist, portrayals of the Gorgon Medusa and a Siren respectively.

The popular conception of Medusa from film is of a scary monster who should be destroyed, and viewers are generally invited to have little, if any, sympathy for her. The most influential portrayal of Medusa from the twentieth century is in *Clash of the Titans* (1981), where Medusa is depicted as a snake-tailed monster, a model created by special effects artist Ray Harryhausen and shot in stop-motion. As Liz Gloyd argues, this Medusa is an example of the "monstrous feminine" (Gloyd 2013).¹¹ In *Clash of the Titans* (2010) a CGI Medusa retains Harryhausen's snake tail, but has the attractive face of model and actress Natalia Vodianova, and Medusa is also made attractive in *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* (2010), played by Uma Thurman with CGI snake hair initially hidden under a turban. However, ultimately both of these characters exist to be destroyed by Perseus and Percy respectively, and the audience's sympathy is encouraged towards the heroes rather than the monsters, which each appear in a single scene where they are both introduced and destroyed. Medusa in *Atlantis*, however, is not only played by an attractive actress (Jemima Rooper), but she also becomes a major character in the series, appearing in nine episodes in the first season and a further three episodes in the second season, becoming Hercules' girlfriend as well as friend to Jason and Pythagoras.

Medusa is introduced in the second episode of the first series, "A Girl by Any Other Name", as a sympathetic and heroic character, when she saves Hercules' life, protecting him from Maenads and Satyrs, when he stumbles across them in the forest. Hercules is immediately smitten and tells his friends that she was "a vision of beauty the like of which I have never seen. I owe her my life" (s1e2, 00:26:54). He persuades his friends to help rescue the girl from the Maenads, who are holding her prisoner to initiate her into their cult of Dionysus. Jason saves her, and when she gives her name as Medusa he is visibly shocked and after they escape he goes to the Oracle to ask about her:

Jason: From my time in the other world, there were stories of someone named Medusa. What is to become of her?

Oracle: I believe you already know the answer to that question.

Jason: She has done no wrong. I will not see her harmed.

Oracle: Medusa can no more escape her destiny than you can escape yours. Her fate is inextricably bound to your own. (s1e2, 00:40:50–00:41:24)

¹⁰ For example on female-centred retellings of the Pandora story on television, cf. Potter (2010).

¹¹ On the "monstrous feminine" see Creed (1993). On the depiction of Medusa in *Clash of the Titans* (1981) also cf. Curley (2015).

The viewer, like Jason, is likely to know of the story of Medusa, from storybooks of Greek myths, or from films like *Clash of the Titans*, and as Jason takes the place of Theseus in slaying the Minotaur we now expect that he may also need to take the place of Perseus in slaying Medusa.

Although not one of the three main protagonists of *Atlantis*, Medusa takes an important supporting role in their adventures. As she works in the palace kitchen, she is in a unique position to help Jason and his friends. For example Medusa is able to save Jason from death by witchcraft by removing the doll with Jason's hair that the evil Queen Pasiphae (*sic*) has been using to incapacitate him ("A Boy of No Consequence", s1e3). She also helps the friends look after an abandoned baby ("A Twist of Fate", s1e4). Her role as beloved of Hercules is central to the series' plot. Medusa overhears Hercules speak of his love for her, which she reciprocates ("A Twist of Fate", s1e4). However, Hercules is not confident about her affections, and when he goes to the sorceress Circe for a love potion to give to Medusa, Medusa falls ill and can only be revived when Jason agrees to help Circe by killing Pasiphae ("The Song of the Sirens", s1e6). Medusa temporarily breaks with Hercules because of his actions, but quickly returns to him as she can see that his love for her is genuine. However, she is again put in danger when she is kidnapped by merchant Kyros, who requires Hercules and his friends to bring him Pandora's Box in order for Medusa to be set free ("Pandora's Box", s1e9). Medusa inadvertently opens the Box, and becomes the snake-haired monster with the petrifying gaze that we (and Jason) have expected from first hearing her name, although Hercules tells her: "You will never be a monster to me" (s1e9, 00:39:22).

Medusa continues to be a sympathetic character even as the Gorgon. She lives alone in a cave so as not to harm people with her ability to turn them to stone, and when Hercules finds a cure that will result in his death she will not accept it. She tells him:

'You think I could live with myself, knowing you had given your life for mine? [...] I would do anything for a cure, anything but this. Knowing we could never be together I would rather stay cursed.' ("The Price of Hope", s1e10, 00:40:40–00:41:01).

It is not until season two that Medusa's final fate is revealed. She agrees to help Pasiphae to kill someone in order to be returned to her human form, but finds out, too late, that she must turn the Oracle to stone, and she cannot live with the guilt for her actions. She enlists Pythagoras' help in retrieving Pandora's Box to return her monstrous form, and Jason's help in committing suicide:

Medusa [to Jason]: It is the only way to defeat Pasiphae! Use me as a weapon. No army can defend against my powers. [...] I cannot live with what I have done! The curse I received for killing the Oracle was not a physical one, but it is no less painful. The guilt gnaws on my mind, it invades my every dream, strangles my every chance of joy. I cannot go on. At least this way my death can bring some good. All you need is my head. ("The Gorgon's Gaze", s2e9, 00:29:11–00:30:02).

Jason reluctantly kills Medusa at her own request; she sacrifices herself so that he can save Atlantis. No longer a monster, Medusa becomes a self-sacrificing heroine.

In *Atlantis* Medusa is introduced from the beginning as a sympathetic character rather than as a monster. "The Curse of the Black Spot" from *Doctor Who* follows the model of "The Earth Bull" and "The God Complex" in introducing the Siren as a monster who is only made sympathetic late in the episode, in a satisfying twist in the plot. Like the Minotaur in "The God Complex", the Siren is a monster removed from any ancient Greek setting, featuring in an episode set aboard a pirate ship in the seventeenth century. The Siren was central to the storyline from the beginning, with "Siren" as the episode's working title, although she was conceived as an amalgamation of the ancient Greek Siren and a mermaid.¹² In the shooting script she is described as:

Young and INCREDIBLY beautiful. Her skin is like verdigris – like oxidised copper. She wears gossamer robes. She smiles a gentle smile and the inside of her mouth glows gold. And the singing – utterly exquisite [...], [although when she is approached] her exquisite face replaced by a screaming mask of hate. Her turquoise glow becomes a red fire. The song becomes a terrifying wail.¹³

The Siren, played by an ethereal-looking model and actress Lily Cole, seems to appear when crew members of the pirate ship the *Fancy* are weakened or injured. The pirate captain, Henry Avery, tells the Doctor's companions that "she charms all her victims with that song" (00:06:59). She never speaks, but before she emerges she is accompanied by music, and a black spot appears on the palms of her victims' hands, the symbol of guilt resulting in death from Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1882), and then when she returns and touches them they disappear. The Doctor's early theory about the Siren is that "she is coming for all the sick and wounded. Like a hunter chooses the weakest animal" (00:13:38). But we eventually find that the people taken by the Siren are not her prey, but rather her patients.

¹² On the creation of the Siren cf. Hickman (2011, 50–54) and Wright (2016, 14–16).

¹³ Excerpt from the shooting script, in Wright (2016, 15).

When the Siren takes the sick pirate captain's son, Toby, and Rory, who has fallen into the sea and was drowning, the Doctor suggests that Amy, the captain, and the Doctor all prick their fingers, so that, as wounded people, the Siren will take them too. Taken by the Siren, they find themselves in a spaceship full of sick people in stasis, being kept alive by the Siren, a "virtual doctor" (00:36:19) in an "automated sick bay" (00:36:09). The Doctor then realizes that the black spot was a tissue sample, and the Siren sang an anaesthetic. The Siren turns red when someone threatens her patients; she is trying to save them, not harm them. At the end of the episode Rory is revived and Avery decides to stay on the spaceship where Toby will be cared for by the Siren, as here he will be able to survive his typhoid fever, which would kill him on board the pirate ship *Fancy*.

The Siren, then, becomes a positive figure, rather than the monster that she originally appears to be. Instead of luring men to their deaths she is taking care of them. The Doctor calls her "intelligent" and "sophisticated" even though she is "just an interface" (00:36:23–00:36:59). In my online research many viewers applauded the change from the Siren as a monstrous *femme fatale* who would lure sailors to their deaths to a doctor who would save them. However, one viewer objected to her inability to speak:

A Siren without a voice – a Siren's defining characteristic? And yet another female character without the ability to speak for herself? And for no good reason? Why would you invent a holographic doctor who can't communicate? Badly done.¹⁴

In fact, the Siren's lack of speaking voice was a fairly late innovation in the story development process. Writer Steve Thompson has revealed that up until the sixth draft of the script the Siren had been given dialogue, but this was then removed as "we decide it's more scary if she says nothing at all" (Hickman 2011, 54). In making her more "scary", the Siren in "The Curse of the Black Spot" loses some of her feminist potential.

Jemima Rooper as Medusa and Lily Cole as the Siren go some way to redeem the female monsters from Greek mythology, creating attractive, though not over sexualized, characters with positive motives. However, as a self-sacrificial heroine and a silent holographic interface, the creators of these characters perhaps do not go far enough towards reclaiming these monsters for feminism, as feminist writers such as H  l  ne Cixous and Mary Daly suggest we should do.¹⁵ We must look to future writers to recreate a Gorgon or a Siren as a heroic action heroine for young viewers to admire and emulate.

¹⁴ Viewer response to an online questionnaire from 2012. It can be found at <<https://surveymonkey.com/r/K5MGFRW>> (accessed March 6, 2020).

¹⁵ On the reclamation of female monsters for feminism cf., e.g., Cixous (1981) and Daly (1979).

Conclusions

BBC Television writers have chosen to re-use monsters familiar from Greek mythology for child and family audiences, building these monsters into the worlds of their series. Little previous knowledge of Greek mythology is required from viewers; we are perhaps expected to know that a Minotaur is half man, half bull, living in a labyrinth, and Medusa has snaky hair and can turn people to stone; information we could have picked up from various children's storybooks of Greek myths. Our expectations are overturned when *Atlantis* makes us rethink these monsters, and sympathize with them as well as with the heroes. *Doctor Who* and *The Sarah Jane Adventures* also offer us a different perspective, suggesting that Greek myths featuring monsters are based on alien creatures, or holographic inhabitants of alien ships, that have come to Earth.

The production teams have created new stories that twenty-first century audiences can relate to, showcasing televisual re-interpretations of classical monsters that are initially just as scary, but also more complex, more believable, and more sympathetic than their ancient Greek counterparts.

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KONRAD DOMINAS

The Internet and Popular Culture: The Reception of Mythical Creatures in the Context of Multimedia and Interactive Materials for Children

The Internet has become a new reception space for ancient literature, thus complementing traditional research models of the presence of Graeco-Roman heritage in present-day culture. Calling attention to the World Wide Web is a consequence of widespread changes occurring in culture and society. As a result of these changes, media to an increasing extent determine various processes within this culture and society (socio-economic, educational, cultural, etc.), taking over more and more human activities. The changes in question also affect relationships between classical studies as broadly defined and information technologies. As early as 1991, Jay David Bolter, one of the most important hypertext theorists, remarked in his article “The Computer, Hypertext, and Classical Studies”:

Indeed, classical philology has in one sense always been hypertextual in spirit, since the essence of philology is to explain one word, idiom, or passage in terms of others from the ancient canon. In a hypertext such relationships find their expression as electronic links. (541–542)

Theodore F. Brunner, director of the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae: A Digital Library of Greek Literature* wrote about the relations mentioned above in a book titled *Accessing Antiquity: The Computerization of Classical Studies* (1993). The topic of the broadly understood presence of Antiquity in contemporary culture (film, music, art, etc.) increasingly also includes the space of new media.¹ Examples in this are discussed in the most recent series by Brill (*inter alia*, “Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity”), Cambridge University Press (“Classics after Antiquity”), Oxford University Press (*inter alia*, “Classical Presences”), and Wiley-Blackwell (“Classical Receptions”).

¹ The most proper definition of new media was apparently put forward by Lev Manovich in his work *The Language of New Media*: “The translation of all existing media into numerical data accessible through computers” (2002, 20).

The aim of this chapter, after some preliminary remarks in regard to the particular character of the research field, is to show the reception of mythical creatures in the context of multimedia and interactive materials for children on the Internet, comprehended both as a medium and as one of the most important parts of popular culture. Thus it is not the mythical creatures as such that will be the subject of our analysis, but the processes these creatures are subjected to in the new environment.

The theme of the first part of the chapter will be the Internet as a space of publishing and sharing content related to classical mythology aimed at a children's public like *Encyclopaedia Britannica Kids* and Wikipedia. This content includes the materials from book editions of mythology, but also descriptions, illustrations, and fragments from well-known novels about mythological themes for children published on the web. In this aspect, the Internet can also be a place where young Internet users can exchange suggestions and comments about their favourite creatures from mythology.

In the second part of the chapter, the Internet will be described as a reception space in which creatures known from mythology become subject to various processes of incorporation and transformation. As examples, we will point to selected films from YouTube and the computer game *Legends of Olympus: Gods & Magic Hero Adventure* (2015). The first and second part of this chapter differ in the mechanisms of incorporation and reception of the described examples. Publishing and sharing are primarily associated with the mechanism of digitizing mythological materials originating from outside the Internet, whereas the second section applies to the specific reception mechanisms (e.g., renarration, transformation, reinterpretation, and transposition) taking place directly on the Web.

In the third part of the chapter, the Internet will be shown as a part of a larger whole, mainly as the space of a cultural and media universe: a supersystem of entertainment.² It is worth clarifying right away the meaning of this term, as it is not very popular in the field of classics. The supersystem of entertainment is a concept proposed by Marsha Kinder in 1991 in her book *Playing with Power in Movies, Television, and Video Games: From Muppet Babies to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. Kinder, who analyzes the effects of media on children (particularly in their development and growth as consumers), wrote:

Thus, even before children go to the cinema, they learn that movies make a vital contribution to an ever-expanding supersystem of entertainment, one marked by transmedia intertextuality. (2)

We will discuss this phenomenon through the example of the strands from the Transformers universe with references to mythical beasts known from Greek mythology. These beasts become a pattern for toy designers, who create products

² This suggested research method originates from Dominas (2017).

such as Predaking (Hasbro.com [n.d.]). At the same time, for hundreds of thousands of Internet users, these beasts are also an opportunity to develop this world of intelligent robots on various websites related to this subject (Alpha Trion's Data Base [n.d.]). Enthusiasts aim to build a unified plot of the Transformers universe, gathering information from various media such as films (e.g., *Transformers*, dir. Michael Bay, 2007), comics (Marvel Comics and Dreamwave Productions), animated features (e.g., *The Transformers: The Movie*, dir. Nelson Shin, 1986), and many more (e.g., the video game *Transformers: Devastation*, Platinum Games, dir. Kenji Saito). Such a collection of individual products centred around a particular brand can be described precisely as a supersystem of entertainment.

With regard to the examples of mythical creatures on the Internet and in popular culture presented in this chapter, we aim to discuss the mechanisms of their incorporation and reception.

Preliminary Remarks

The shape of the concept adopted in this chapter is decided by two extremely significant terms: myth and reception. A proper definition of the first of these two terms is thus one of the most important issues in the topic considered here. Therefore, the analysis of a mythical tale in the spirit of a specific mythical theory (ritualism, structural anthropology, structural functionalism, etc.) should be explicitly distinguished from the study of relations between mythical-literary archetype and its presence in various children's texts. According to Mark P. O. Morford and Robert J. Leonardon, whose definition we accept for the purpose of the present analysis, "myth" is defined as follows:

A myth may be a story that is narrated orally, but usually it is eventually given written form. A myth also may be told by means of no words at all, for example, through painting, sculpture, music, dance, and mime, or by a combination of various media, as in the case of drama, song, opera, or the movies. (2003, 3)

In the context of Greek and Roman literature, it is worth mentioning also the words of Claude Lévi-Strauss from his *Structural Anthropology*:

On the contrary, we define the myth as consisting of all its versions; or to put it otherwise, a myth remains the same as long as it is felt as such. [...] There is no single "true" version of which all the others are but copies or distortions. Every version belongs to the myth. (1963, 216–217)

These words take on a new meaning in the context of children's literature and products intended for children. Along with the above context, I also refer to the notion of myth degradation, introduced by Mircea Eliade, in whose opinion:

A myth may degenerate into an epic legend, a ballad or a romance, or survive only in the attenuated form of “superstitions”, customs, nostalgias, and so on; for all this, it loses neither its essence nor its significance. (1958, 431)

The phenomenon of degradation is subject to four processes: demythologization, as a result of which myth becomes a probable story; allegorization in which the symbolic contents of the myth are reduced to the metaphorical level; euhemerization presenting myth as an effect of deification of great leaders; and desacralization as an effect of correlations of structures between myth, saga, and fairy tale (Trocha 2009, 74).

Another important term in this chapter is reception. Lorna Hardwick and Christopher Stray in their introduction to *A Companion to Classical Receptions* use the term reception in the plural:

By “receptions” we mean the ways in which Greek and Roman material has been transmitted, translated, excerpted, interpreted, rewritten, re-imagined and represented. (2008, 1)

In the context of the study of Classical Antiquity in cyberspace, I propose a definition of reception that emphasizes the specific character of the medium. Therefore, I define the term “reception” as a process in which the motifs and threads of ancient literature are influenced by particular mechanisms of the digital environment. These mechanisms allow the content to be influenced by multiple transformations. The onset of such a process is arbitrary and depends greatly on the perspective of the user of this medium who initially undertakes the analysis. In addition, once started, it cannot be stopped and it resembles an irreversible chemical reaction (Dominas 2014, 104). The Pegasus may be one of the most recognizable creatures known from the myths of Perseus and Bellerophon. However, when we “use” this creature in cyberspace, applying appropriate mechanisms for this, Pegasus can come to mean creativity and innovation (ASUSTeK Computer Inc., cf. ASUS [n.d.]), speed (Pegasus Mail by David Harris),³ or reliability (Pegasus Airlines Inc.).⁴ The new symbolism of Pegasus transferred to the web becomes part of the knowledge about it, a part of the new Internet myth that each user can process in any way.

³ Pegasus Mail is one of the oldest email clients and is developed and maintained by David Harris (2018).

⁴ Pegasus Airlines is a Turkish low-cost airline (Turkaramamotoru Search Engine 2014).

The Internet as a Space of Publishing and Sharing Mythological Content

In traditional lexicons and books about mythology – also those intended for children – mythological beasts either are a part of specific myths or have separate chapters dedicated to them. As an example of a separate chapter one may point to “Lesser Gods, Magical Creatures and Heroic Ancestors” in Philip Matyszak’s *The Greek and Roman Myths: A Guide to the Classical Stories* (2010; cf. also Rosen 2009). However, usually mythological beasts either accompany great heroes or belong to stories related to a specific mythical event. For example, the Nemean Lion, Lernaean Hydra, Stymphalian Birds will be found in the myths of Heracles; the Minotaur with Theseus; Medusa and the Gorgons with Perseus; or the Cyclops during Odysseus’ adventures. Similarly, Typhon, Geryon, and Alcioneus will be found during the Gigantomachy, while Cerberus will appear in various myths connected to the Underworld, especially the three-headed dog turns up in the course of tales about Heracles, Theseus, and Orpheus.

The situation is no different on the web. There each young recipient will find dozens, even hundreds of web pages – encyclopaedic as well as social – dedicated to the creatures mentioned above. Most encyclopaedias (e.g., *Greek Mythology Link* by Parada 1997, *Theoi Greek Mythology* by Atsma 2000–2019, and *Britannica Kids* 2019) are digital forms of traditional reference works based on different sources, such as Wilhelm Heinrich Roscher’s *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie* (1884–1937). This space consists thus of publishing and sharing materials with mythological content. Consider *Britannica Kids* which, unlike the free Wikipedia, is a paid website (*Encyclopaedia Britannica Kids* 2019). Depending on the choice of age range, after one enters the word “Minotaur” as a search term, one will get direct access to material regarding this beast (ages 11 and up; cf. *Britannica Kids* 2019, s.v. “Minotaur”) or instead one will be redirected to materials related to Daedalus (ages 8–11; cf. *Britannica Kids* 2019, s.v. “Daedalus”). It is worth adding that all age-related divisions on the Internet are conventional, and their functioning on the service often has a marketing aspect. At the level of Internet technology, the server hosting the website’s content is not able to recognize whether it is an adult or child who is using the computer. Differences in the search results probably arise from the website architecture, which is based on the scheme from the general to the detail. A similar aspect to *Britannica Kids* is provided by a portal called *National Geographic Kids*, for example its *5 Terrifying Tales from Greek Mythology* illustrated by Ben Shannon (*National Geographic Kids* [n.d.]).

In the context of this area, it is worth paying attention to the fact that most Internet users rely on the Google search engine. Hence, they came across the highest ranked pages, such as YouTube, Wikipedia, and many others. Google’s PageRank algorithm, as well as a number of different algorithms in conjunction with personalization mechanisms, are responsible for a list of pages that provide

information about mythical beasts to young web users (Zickuhr and Rainie 2011). Therefore, this area of myth transformation on the one hand has an informational character, e.g., “a fun and educational web site with lots of interesting content”, as stated by the administrators of *Ancient Greece: Monsters and Creatures of Greek Mythology* (Ducksters [n.d.]), but on the other hand, it provides tools allowing young people to share information as well as to comment it by themselves. For the latter, an example is the YouTube as a platform of publishing and sharing digital materials, where a young Internet user can not only upload a self-made film and reply to viewers’ comments, but he or she can also comment on other productions. MichaelDean Marbach, the author of *The Minotaur’s story* (the movie was released on April 20, 2016), responds (spelling original) to Internet users’ comments with the following statement: “Thanks it was a school project and I am not that good an artist so it kinda worked out” (Marbach 2016). It should not be forgotten that the web is a communication space between users.

The Internet and Popular Culture as a Space of Myth Reception

In the space of the Internet and popular culture, certain mechanisms – media, social, or cultural – lead to changes in the function and content of the mythical-literary original. However, it should be emphasized that the concept of original may be exclusively applied to a specific literary text, e.g., Hyginus’ (*Fabulae* 30), Pseudo-Apollodorus’ stories of the Lernaean Hydra (*Bibliotheca* 2.5.2), or Plutarch’s stories of the Minotaur (*The Life of Theseus* 29). Yet even those stories, according to Eliade’s concept, are already degraded myths. Identifying the sources of those stories is an extremely complicated task and dependent on the accepted mythical theory.⁵ For example, Robert Graves considers the motif of Hercules’ encounter with the Nemean Lion as the sacred king’s ritual combat with wild beasts (this ritual formed a regular part of the coronation ritual in Greece, Asia Minor, Babylonia, and Syria; cf. Graves 2011, 12).

Various videos published on the YouTube social network may serve as examples of the mythical creatures’ reception. YouTube as social networking platform is used in fact to publish and share specific content (see the first part of this chapter). However, the differences between *Greek Mythology Link* or *Theoi Greek Mythology* and YouTube videos are fundamental and do not pertain strictly to the very nature of services and file formats. While the first two are created by experts in mythology, Internet amateurs are primarily responsible for all processes related to the functioning of YouTube. The work of these Internet

⁵ Outstanding mythologist Carl Kerényi draws attention to this: “Mythology is never the biography of the gods, as often appears to the observer. This is particularly true of ‘mythology properly so called’: mythology in its purest, most pristine form” (2002, 29).

amateurs is based on the premises of collective intelligence, participatory culture, and media convergence, i.e. three determinants of contemporary culture described by Henry Jenkins in *Convergence Culture* (2006, 2–3).

In social networking services, we usually encounter different receptions of ancient beasts as a part of Greek and Roman myth and mythology. These acts of reception may be analyzed according to the concept of Polish literary theorist Henryk Markiewicz who distinguishes four metamorphoses of a myth:

1. renarration – the repetition of a traditional myth;
2. transformation – specific change in the function and meaning of a myth via selection, decomposition, substitution and amplification of particular legends;
3. reinterpretation – transformation of a given myth based on:
 - a. adaptation of a tale to a different view of the world and ideology,
 - b. the polemic with the traditional ideological significance of a myth,
 - c. parody referring to a given mythical tale;
4. transposition – the transfer of entire myths or their elements into a different cultural and social space-time (1987, 57–58).

Myth in children's literature and on websites is a form of reception of both the tale itself (to a lesser extent) and ancient literature (to a greater extent). On the World Wide Web we deal with renarration and transformation.⁶ One of those YouTube examples is material shared by user AjaxD07 in 2012. This is an ink animation of the story of Theseus and the Minotaur accompanied by music composed by Hans Zimmer from Ridley Scott's film *Gladiator* (2000). This material is a typical renarration that portrays the most important motifs of one of the most popular Greek myths.

It is difficult to unequivocally state whether this type of animations are published on YouTube by children. However, there is no doubt that these animations are intended just for them and are also used by them. These animations constitute proof of children's interest in the ancient world in popular culture,

⁶ It is worth adding here that with the processes of renarration and the transformation of myth, we also deal in traditional literature for children. Katarzyna Marciniak's *Moja pierwsza mitologia* [My First Mythology, 2013] may be treated as a renarration of myth and ancient literature, and subsequently a transformation of already-processed motifs and threads to the needs and requirements of a young recipient. A good example of such an adaptation is text about the adventures of Theseus with a short-story filler about a cat called Homer (wrongly accused of eating chocolate pudding). From this text children find out the meaning of the phrase "to follow the thread to the end". Additionally, an older reader of this text can also give young recipients a few words of explanation about Homer, i.e. why he is noteworthy, while telling stories of heroes such as Theseus, Hercules, Jason, and others (cf. Marciniak 2013, 217–223).

something which can be illustrated by the following three films: *Theseus and The Minotaur Year 5 Lego animation* (Pilgrim Primary 2014), *Theseus and the Minotaur. [MINECRAFT MINI MOVIE!!]* (TheJenkins123 2013), as well as *Hercules and his first labour: The Nemean Lion (Age of Mythology cinematic)* (LFrank Productions 2015). The first of these films was indeed prepared by a group of pupils of the Pilgrim Primary School in Plymouth, England, in 2014. It tells the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur, but in the form of a Lego-brick animated story told by children. Thus, this material is not only comprehensible, it is also placed into the well-known children's universe of the Danish company's products. The subsequent film is also a Lego-brick animated story. This time, however, a particular line of products (Lego Minecraft) was used. Lego Minecraft is a Lego theme based on an independent open world, namely the computer game Minecraft (created by Markus Persson and developed by the studio Mojang AB since 2009).⁷ This Lego brick-animated story was published by user TheJenkins123 with the following description:

Here's a latin project that I helped my friend out on. This is based on Theseus and The Minotaur myth. Please pardon the spelling, for there is no autocorrect in Sony Vegas :((TheJenkins123 2013, original spelling, incl. emoticon)

The third film, on the other hand, was based on the universe of *Age of Mythology*, a real-time strategy video game (developed by Ensemble Studios in 2002). This film tells the story of the first labour of Heracles. The creator, LFrank Productions, informs us about this in the short description below the film: "Here we will watch how the hero completed his first task: to slay the Nemean Lion. Hope you enjoy the video" (2015).

Another example of mythical beasts' reception in pop culture, closely related to the Internet (e.g., through a forum and real-time chat for participants), is the game *Legends of Olympus: Gods & Magic Hero Adventure*, produced by Frismos Games (2015) for mobile devices based on the Android operating system. The game has been categorized by Google Play as a product for the whole family. According to the standards of the Pan European Game Information, the *Legends of Olympus* rating is 3, which means that the game does not include scenes that could frighten a child (PEGI [n.d.]). However, it should be remembered that this form of entertainment contains both advertisements and in-app purchases.

At the very beginning of the game, the player gives his or her age, so the game settings are adjusted to this player's perception abilities as well as knowledge and experience. The older the participant is, the greater and more

⁷ Minecraft is an independent production that allows players to create their own objects and build their own invented buildings in a world embedded in the "realities" of the fantasy.

complicated the number of challenges. *Legend of Olympus* is a simulation game. Its main challenge is to breed and then take care of one or more of sixty mythical beasts, for example, Daedalus Bull, Sphinx, Giant, the Minotaur, and many more. The creators also introduced hybrid creatures, combining creatures known from mythology with “traditional” animals, such as Taurobull, Hippotaur, Fishpan, and others. Participants build a mythical city in which they breed beasts and then participate in various adventures, fighting for example with the Titans.

At the reception level, the game is both a simple renarration (the underwater world and Hades, heroes, the pantheon of the Olympic gods) and transformation (building one’s own scenarios based on the myths and stories available in the game) of Greek and Roman mythological motifs and threads adapted to young audiences both at the level of knowledge and graphics reminiscent of children’s cartoons. The main assumption of the creators is “Create Your Own Greek Mythology”, thanks to which the game combines creative fun with elements of education. Mythical beasts can be looked after by players who already know the basics of mythology, as well as those who are just beginning their adventure with the world of myths.

The Internet as the Space of a Cultural and Media Universe

In present-day culture, processes of reception occur more and more often simultaneously in several areas, and they have created in this way a system of communicating vessels. The originality of this phenomenon is based not as much on combining and penetrating these spaces, but on its scale, range, and speed of contemporary changes. In this system the majority of processes are usually concentrated around one core, for example a particular story, film, animation, or even a social-networking profile (Dominas 2016). In this space of reception, marketing and advertising mechanisms play a fundamental role. Within the concept of Kinder’s supersystem of entertainment, mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, a large number of products is concentrated around the above-mentioned core, where consecutive products are added to the set and sustain its lifetime according to basic marketing rules (Kotler and Keller 2012, 438–441). These products do not have to comprise a compact whole, but rather they should complement each other. The author *Playing with Power in Movies...* develops the concepts of dialogism and intertextuality (adopted from Mikhail Bakhtin and Julia Kristeva), that is, she extends those concepts to new media spaces (Kinder 1991, 2–3). The resulting system she terms a “supersystem of transmedia intertextuality”:

In these expanding networks of synergy, connectivity, collectability, restructuring, new world orders (and other postmodernist buzzwords), children, corporations, and countries are learning that transmedia intertextuality is a powerful strategy for survival. (39)

An example of such a supersystem of transmedia intertextuality are Transformers – the popular fantasy race of intelligent and extremely advanced robots who hail from the planet Cybertron. Their distinctive feature is their transformation ability, i.e. they can change their bodies into other shapes, such as vehicles, animals, or objects. This supersystem was created on the basis of toys made by two companies: TakaraTomy, selling products mainly in Japan (series Diaclone and MicroChange), and Hasbro, operating in the United States of America. The Transformers are usually divided into the two factions of the Autobots, led by Optimus Prime, and the Decepticons, ruled by Megatron. Apart from those two heroes, the Autobot Bumblebee and Decepticon Starscream are also very popular. Currently the Transformers supersystem consists of hundreds of products: books, films, toys, games, comics, toy bricks, etc., intended for every audience. The latest animated productions by Hasbro Studios may serve as an example. *Transformers: Rescue Bots* (TV Series, 2011–2016) is intended for the youngest recipients; *Transformers: Robots in Disguise* (TV Series, 2015–2017) aim at the children ages 7–12, whereas *Transformers: Prime* (TV Series, 2010–2013) is intended for both children and adult fans of Optimus, Megatron, and Bumblebee. Each of those series includes a compact whole, but they are united within the supersystem by the characters of the Autobots and Decepticons as well as the planet of Cybertron. This is very well illustrated by the large number of fan pages in wiki format. There users gather, publish, and edit information about specific products, motifs, characters and events, and they can also discuss this world (cf. Transformers Wiki [n.d.]; *Transformers Comics Discussion* [n.d.]).

Transformers: Prime consists of both three series of episodic adventures (65 episodes total) and the full-length animated film *Transformers Prime Beast Hunters: Predacons Rising* (directed by Vinton Heuck, Scooter Tidwell, and Todd Waterman, USA, 2013).⁸ Besides simple references to mythology, such as the name of the Decepticons' flag starship *Nemesis*, other interesting motifs also appear. One of them is related to the tenth episode of the first season, titled *Deus ex machina* (*Transformers: Prime* 2011). In this episode the Energon Harvester,⁹ a powerful artefact posing a threat to all Transformers, turns up. Optimus Prime tells how the Ancient Greeks left behind information about this object:

⁸ All three series together with the film describe the history of the fight of the Autobots (Optimus Prime, Bumblebee, Ratchet, Arcee, Bulkhead, Wheeljack, Smokescreen, Ultra Magnus) and their human allies (Jack Darby, Miko Nakadai, Raf Esquivel) under the leadership of William Fowler against the Decepticons (Starscream, Soundwave, Laserbeak, Knock Out, Shockwave, Airachnid, Breakdown, Dreadwing) controlled by Megatron.

⁹ The title artefact had been localized as a part of a statue in a museum in the fictional city of Jasper in the state of Nevada. This statue was probably modeled after Hades' images from the Internet and popular culture.

[Optimus] - It is indeed an Energon Harvester. A powerful tool created by the ancients to remove raw Energon from any source.

[Jack] - The Greek gods knew Autobots?

[Optimus] - No. The ancients often used the art of a given era to conceal messages. This fresco was likely a signpost indicating a harvester's location hidden somewhere on this planet. (*Transformers: Prime* 2010, ep. 10, 00:06:35–00:07:00)

The screenwriters referred to this thesis (known from, *inter alia*, Erich von Däniken's pseudoscientific books) that ancient civilizations had maintained constant relations with extraterrestrials. An interesting addition to this concept, however, is that the Transformers are a race of intelligent robots built from CNA (Cybernucleic Acid) strands.

Most interesting in the context of ancient beast reception is the third series titled *Beasts Hunters* (2013), where the Predacons, a race of prehistoric beasts that lived on Cybertron before the Transformers, constitute the focal point. As Optimus Prime states in the fifth episode of this series, "Autobots, we must become Beast Hunters" (*Transformers: Prime* 2013, ep. 57, 00:08:42–00:08:46). The leader of those creatures is Predaking. He was cloned by the Decepticon Shockwave and is initially an ally of Megatron and an opponent of Optimus (the latter he accuses of preventing the resurrection of his race). From Megatron's account we discover that the Predacons had been reconstructed in the past at his behest (preda-clones) and sent to Earth:

During the war for Cybertron [Megatron says to Decepticons – K. D.] I sanctioned the dispatch of a small army of these preda-clones to Earth to unleash the beasts on unwitting Autobot forces stationed here. Once they accomplished their mission, the surviving Predacons held sentinel on this very world for ages to come, guarding the Energon reserves they had managed to secure while awaiting my arrival. Of course, our reunion here was much delayed, and it would seem we lost the beasts to the ravages of time. (*Transformers: Prime* 2013, ep. 57, 00:09:23–00:09:58)

The remains of those creatures had survived on Earth and became the basis for the experiment of their second resurrection. The Autobots found out about this experiment and it is worth quoting their conversation about this event in its entirety:

[Ratchet] - Optimus, did you find Energon?

[Optimus] - No. But I did uncover this.

[Ratchet] - It cannot be.

[Jack] - Be what?

[Optimus] - The ancient remains... of a Predacon.

[Ratchet] - Though it remains unclear why such a skull would be found on your planet, its presence reveals all too much about the Predacon which Megatron recently sent in pursuit of us.

[Miko] - You mean that dragon bot we put on ice?

[Ratchet] - Except that Predacons have been extinct since, well...

[Smokescreen] - Since before most life began on Cybertron.

[Raf] - They're like Earth's dinosaurs.

[Jack] - Which means, for you guys, running into one would be like us meeting a T-Rex.

[Miko] - So then what were dinobots?

[Bulkhead] - Totally different. (ibid., 00:07:03–00:08:01)

Then how did those creatures go unnoticed by humans? According to Optimus' account they have survived in the form of stories of mythical beasts from Antiquity and medieval times. It is worth drawing attention to the Cybertronian images depicting Predacons. This is confirmed by the dialogue between Ratchet, Jack, Optimus, and Raf:

[Ratchet] – [...] from our historical texts.

[Jack] - But those are metal versions of creatures from our Greek mythology and medieval literature.

[Raf] - Not dinosaurs.

[Optimus] - It would stand to reason that Predacons did indeed walk upon this Earth in ancient times, as they seem to have been the basis for much of human-kind's folklore. Illustrating once again that the pasts of Earth and Cybertron are inextricably linked. (ibid., 00:10:39–00:11:04)

The references to mythology mentioned in this section become a part of the supersystem of entertainment based on *Transformers*. The particular mythical themes are primarily a background for the history related to the Predacons. In this way, the authors have combined ancient mythology with the story of the film, giving new meanings (transformation process) to the mythical beasts. These meanings, in accordance with the supersystem of entertainment, offer

countless opportunities to create products (mainly toys) referring not only to *Transformers* but also to ancient mythology.¹⁰

The example described above is important because it illustrates perfectly the mechanisms of popular culture. It seems that more and more products intended for children implement a scenario of supersystem of transmedia intertextuality. This is shown by the original Lego series consisting of Lego Bionicle, Lego Ninjago, and Lego Nexo Knights. The basis of these products are not only Lego-block sets, but also animated films (e.g., *Bionicle: The Legend Reborn*, dir. Mark Baldo, USA 2009), web applications (e.g., LEGO® NEXO KNIGHTS™: MERLOK 2.0), computer games (e.g., *LEGO Battles: Ninjago NDS*, Hellbent Games, 2011), websites, and other media.

Conclusion

The examples of the Internet phenomena involving mythical beasts' as described in this chapter are arranged in the process leading from publishing and sharing mythology, through the reception process, to the moment where myth becomes a part of the larger system of the cultural and media universe. In this process new media are both a place to acquire information and a digital platform allowing one to publish and share it. Literature and popular culture become the complement to the media. Understanding the mechanisms of the myth's reception and transformation in the context of various products intended for children therefore requires interdisciplinary reflection, which may allow us to grasp the essence of the issue. It is the answer to the question of why mythology still fascinates and moves us in the twenty-first century. The search for the answer to this question should never end.

¹⁰ Another concept – transmedia storytelling – was proposed by Henry Jenkins in *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. Jenkins writes: “Transmedia storytelling is the art of world making. To fully experience any fictional world, consumers must assume the role of hunters and gatherers, chasing down bits of the story across media channels, comparing notes with each other via online discussion groups, and collaborating to ensure that everyone who invests time and effort will come away with a richer entertainment experience” (2006, 21).

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KATARZYNA MARCINIAK

Chasing Mythical Muppets: Classical Antiquity according to Jim Henson

“And should you need us, for any reason at all...”
Jim Henson, *Labyrinth* (1986)

*To all my mythical Friends and Colleagues
who believe deep enough and strong enough...*

Homeric laughter. How to explain the meaning of this expression to children in the easiest of ways? Anna M. Komornicka (1920–2018), Professor of the Classics at the University of Łódź, faced this challenge in her book *Nić Ariadny, czyli po nitce do kłębka* [The Thread of Ariadne, or Finding Your Way, 1989], in which she sought to acquaint young readers with the heritage of Antiquity present in idioms. She decided to refer to cultural life in the Poland of the 1980s.¹ In that often gloomy time, Komornicka’s choice was cheerfully simple: Homeric laughter is the reaction of viewers to *The Muppet Show*, she wrote (1989, 128), knowing that the kids would well understand her reference.

In fact, this programme was very popular, even adored in Poland. At that time, Polish TV offered only two channels, and people – still trapped in “the brave new world” behind the Iron Curtain – enthusiastically welcomed each foreign production. But regardless of those circumstances, the Muppets fully merited the viewers’ admiration. Indeed, they are mythical creatures: in only the few decades of their existence, they have permeated our culture to such a degree that their juxtaposition with Homer is hardly surprising – it is in fact natural. In some fields, the Muppets have achieved even more than the creatures from Greek mythology. For not only do they have their own Wiki fandom community,² but also a magazine, in 2002 their progenitor Kermit the Frog was

¹ In this volume, targeted at children able to read on their own, Komornicka gathered and explained fifty of the most popular mythological expressions, and showed their use in every-day life settings of the twentieth century. For more on the volume see Marciniak 2015, 75–80.

² This is a priceless treasury of information on classical references, thanks to the fans preserving each interesting thread, cf. Muppet Wiki [n.d.], s.v. “Main Page”. Let’s

awarded his own star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, and as recently as July 2018 he was even interviewed for the BBC News – the largest and most prestigious broadcaster in the world (Geoghegan 2018) – something Hercules, for one, has yet to achieve.

Jennifer C. Garlen and Anissa M. Graham, the editors of *Kermit Culture* (2009, republished in 2014), observe in the “Preface” to their study that the Muppets are simply everywhere, and are veritable icons:

We see them on billboards and buttons, on television commercials and talk shows. Nobody has to explain who they are; consumers recognize Kermit and Miss Piggy the way they recognize Marilyn Monroe and Mickey Mouse. (2014, 2)

The term “consumers” does not surprise here, as cultural success is often measured today in terms of market potential. At this point, it is worth observing that the characters from Greek and Roman myths have also been taking a strong foothold in global marketing campaigns as attractive vehicles of positive traits associable with certain products.³ But both the mythological protagonists and the Muppets are much more than that. And when they work together, they give rise to an indomitable force that is capable of challenging the mundane rhythm of contemporary society and of teaching us how to use the potency of myth again, in order to re-discover the real Meaning in our lives, the one with a capital “M”.

The Muppets originate from the imagination of Jim Henson (1936–1990) – a true visionary, for a visionary was needed to see in a mother’s old felt coat a creature ready to be brought to life. That day in 1955 Kermit the Frog was born (Jones 2016, 47).

Like the mythical Icarus, Henson boldly crossed the borders assigned to humans.⁴ As a result, he and his heirs have been broadening our understanding of the world. In this pioneering journey (let us remember: the Muppets are a phenomenon of merely the twentieth and twenty-first centuries) an important role is played by ancient tradition – namely, classical mythology. In this chapter I present the results of my exciting chase after the references to Classical Antiquity in Jim Henson’s universe – from the short forms, like selected mentions, allusions, and single scenes and episodes in *Fraggle Rock*, *The Muppet Show* / *Muppets Tonight*, *Sesame Street*, and *Muppet Babies*; through a longer structure focused on classical mythology *sensu stricto* – the TV mini-series *Storyteller: Greek Myths*; up to the extravagant movie of cult following

observe, however, that there is also a fandom community for myths – Mythology Wiki [n.d.], s.v. “Main Page”.

³ From Ajax – the strong detergent, through Hestia – an insurance company, up to the recent Caesar – the lover of chips (cf. Marciniak 2019a), and the 2019 collection by Dolce & Gabbana paying homage to Ancient Greece and Rome.

⁴ In a slide from his movie *Time Piece* (1965) we can see him indeed equipped with enormous wings (cf. Muppet Wiki [n.d.], s.v. “Time Piece”).

Labyrinth, in which Henson achieved what is the lot of the greatest of artists alone: he entered the realm of ancient mythology and became one of its fully-fledged citizens in creatively drawing from the heritage of the past the power to shape our contemporary world.

It is remarkable that the wish to mould reality accompanied Henson from his early years, which in itself is an interesting testimony to the importance of childhood for our adult choices. As he admitted in one of his last interviews: “When I was young, my ambition was to be one of the people who makes a difference in this world. My hope still is to leave this world a little bit better” (Garlen and Graham 2014, 12). He succeed, and with a little help from his mythical friends.

Garlen and Graham observe that in the face of the “complexity and the enduring appeal of *The Muppet Show* and its cast, it is surprising that so few scholars have thus far offered critical readings of them” (4). Indeed, the Muppet universe has a huge research potential, one still waiting to be explored. However, this very complexity and the appeal of Henson’s creatures also make me tread cautiously and with humility, even while focusing on just one – “mythological” – aspect of his world. But I do hope to encourage the in-depth analyses of other aspects that, altogether, will one day do justice to the mastery of its creator.⁵ At the same time, in my study I take into due consideration chosen fragments of the above-mentioned productions that have been completed or continued by Henson’s heirs and collaborators. For his extraordinary spirit has left a mark on his team members who – as much as they were devastated by his premature death⁶ – nonetheless (or precisely because of this) have been developing his vision, to the delight of the ever new generations of his fans all over the world – another proof that we are dealing with a true myth here.

The Ancient Ancestors of the Muppets

I called Henson an Icarus for his boldly childish (in the positive meaning of this adjective) eagerness to transcend the borders between myth and reality and to push the boundaries of human imagination. Yet, at the same time he displayed certain traits of the mature Daedalus in terms of his awareness of what he wished to achieve. He became the architect of a universum he shared with his friends and colleagues and with his once and future audience. “It’s such a wonderful

⁵ And the material to study is huge, including the innovative steps by Henson’s team to address the challenges of contemporary society, like the integration of people with autism (Muppet Julia) or from countries affected by wars (Muppet Zari from Afghanistan). See also Bacon 1997; Dale and Foy 2015; The Jim Henson Company [n.d.].

⁶ In the fan-community interview of January 7, 2018, for Reddit, Frank Oz was still unable to talk about it (Oz 2018a).

challenge to try to design an entire world [...] like no one has ever seen before” – he remarked in an interview (Jones 2016, 305). And he rose to this challenge, owing to his deep understanding (be it knowingly or intuitively, or both) of the essence of the ancient art of puppetry.

In the postproduction phase of the *Labyrinth*, he observed: “[p]uppetry is one of the oldest theater forms. It’s been around as long as theater has. It’s an ancient tradition that draws on myth and legend” (in Block and Erdmann [2016], 23). Jim’s innovation consisted in rediscovering the primordial charm of the puppets, developing their potential, and “converting them to the worlds of film and television” (ibid.). Garlen and Graham, noticing that “*The Muppet Show* merged many different types of puppetry, including traditional hand puppets, marionettes, rod puppets and full body puppets, into a single show”, justly emphasize an important aspect of this programme, one often forgotten – mainly, that it “fascinated adult viewers” (2014, 3). In fact, it ran in “the adult-oriented prime time slot” (2) and with an adult guest star. This should offer food for thought for all who dismiss it as childish (here in the worst meaning of the adjective, i.e. unworthy of serious interest) entertainment.

Actually, the matter is even more complex. Henson and his team were among the first artists of popular culture who managed to return to myth also in terms of blurring the line between the young and adult audience, much to the delight of the actors as well (though it seemed that only they and the children were aware of this fact). Let us give voice to Henson’s closest friend and collaborator Frank Oz. In his Tweet of February 9, 2018, he recalls:

Some people think The Muppets are for children. Nope. I never once had the kids in mind when I performed. I mean, what’s the difference between performing for kids and performing for adults, anyway? We were adults and we had fun performing as adults. And the kids got it. (2018b)

Indeed, this kind of entertainment has always been in the hands of adults, and of the most expert ones. As early as with Homer’s *Iliad* we know of the “dancing robots” and other moving creatures forged by Hephaestus – an Olympian god in person (cf. Hom. *Il.* 18.371–379; *Od.* 7.87–94). His work was continued by the brightest minds of Classical Antiquity, from the mythical Daedalus to the “high-tech” scientists from the Mouseion at Alexandria (Arist. *De anima* 406b; Plin. *NH* 34.42.148),⁷ who elaborated a whole range of human and animalesque beings that were able to walk and fly and perform spectacles, and thus to please powerful rulers, their children, courtiers, and subjects. Nor did the “father” of the most famous marionette in children’s culture, Geppetto (his name being an Italian diminutive of Joseph – the greatest carpenter in the Creation Story), plan to make a toy for kids only. Pinocchio was to be a puppet suitable for travelling

⁷ Cf. also Riva 2012; Moore 2014, 204; Mayor 2018. See also Haraway 2016.

performances that would bring his creator a specific profit: a slice of bread and a glass of wine (Jaques 2015, 215; Bonanni 2012; Marciniak 2019b, 232). A plan based on the assumption that (adult) viewers would pay for such performances should not surprise us, for – as Bernard Shaw observes – when compared with real people on stage, “[p]uppets have also a fascination of their own, because there is nothing wonderful in a living actor moving and speaking, but that wooden headed dolls should do so is a marvel that never palls” (2015; cf. Segel 1995, 3–4).

This aspect is also encoded in the Greek name for puppets – *θαῦμα*, which shares its root with the verbs *θαύομαι* – “to wonder at”, and *θεάομαι* – “to gaze” ([Valpy] 1860, 59; Hunzinger 2015). And in fact, it is difficult to take your eyes off Jim Henson’s Muppets. Their name is believed to have originated from the combination of the two words “marionette” and “puppet”, yet according to the alternative tradition it may just as well have sprung “out of mid air” to Henson’s mind and only later would he forge a “scholarly” etymology for it, to satisfy inquisitive journalists (cf. Muppet Wiki [n.d.], s.v. “Does «Muppet» mean «Marionette and puppet?»”).

Sometimes, however, creations spin out of the control of their creators. In Henson’s case, the very act of giving the Muppets their own name is significant. For to name a creature means to call it to life. And so it happened, indeed. To quote Henson’s daughter Lisa, “[...] the Muppets are idiosyncratic – they don’t fit in the human world, yet you just accept them” (in Block and Erdmann [2016], 23). And this acceptance occurs quite easily – maybe because there is a link between puppets, Muppets, and humans. This ancient link Henson managed to “activate”. In the *Laws* Plato writes “that each of us living creatures is an ingenious puppet of the gods (*θαῦμα θεῖον*), whether contrived by way of a toy of theirs or for some serious purpose” (Plato, *Laws* I, 644d, trans. R. G. Bury in Plato 1967–1968; cf. also Riva 2012, 213). Further in the *Laws* Plato expresses no doubt that the main dramatic prize would be awarded to the showman of puppets by the tiniest children, were they to be the judges (II, 658c; cf. also Moore 2014; Hunzinger 2015, 432). Therefore those adults who would be inclined to grant the palm of victory to puppetry, would return to their childhood, if not to say – from Plato’s perspective – to infancy. Their group is quite numerous and the Greek philosopher is obviously not happy with this. After all, in the famous metaphor of the cave in the *Republic* he describes our life as passive participation in a theatre of shadows (cf. Gocer 1999; Kurke 2013). Yet entertainment and seriousness merely seem to be mutually exclusive, and it is precisely the potential of their unexpected fusion that Henson makes use of in creating the Muppets.

Scholars note the application of mechanisms characteristic of ancient drama in puppetry (Michanczyk 1973; Jaques 2015, 215). In this sense, the comism of the puppet spectacles could be a means of carnivalization (cf. Moore 2014), something so needed by us humans as the species *Homo ludens* (Huizinga 1955)

to preserve our mental well-being and test (and push) the boundaries of our freedom. Maybe Henson and his team, by taking children seriously, noticed the main paradox inherent in childhood. In fact, this phase is supposed to prepare young people for an autonomous life; however, at the same time, children – similarly to puppets – depend on the adults who govern them in an often authoritarian way (Lawson Lucas 2012, 49; Marciniak 2019b).

In view of this, you would think that the marionettes are totally deprived of any influence on their fate. Nothing could be more wrong. It is none other than Plato who remarks that if the puppets are not harnessed up, they play truant and run away (*Meno* 97d).⁸ As we shall see, the source of Henson's success may lie precisely in his decision not to harness the Muppets up, but to let them act at their own volition, through the talent of his collaborators-puppeteers and in the imagination of his public. Abiding the principle of reciprocity, then, the Muppets, instead of running away, stay and help Henson give agency to the children and restore the essence of agency to the adults – and this by means of the most entertaining lessons in freedom and identity development, some of which draw on classical mythology.

Docere, movere, delectare, or the Muppets & Co.

Donna R. White, who studies the phenomenon of enhancing children's literary experiences through film, highly values Henson's methods and achievements in this respect. She appreciates in particular his way of building contact with the public:

Henson's literary and film references become a private communication between director and viewer, so that the viewer feels like a participant in the film. By weaving a network of connections using familiar stories and films, Henson shows his young viewers that film and literature are related and that current movies and books owe much to the works that predate them. (1993, 128)

Henson's pioneering open-mindedness manifested itself in his telltale approach to the texts of culture. He rejected the *a priori* division into a high and low stream as that would limit his interaction with viewers. Instead, his method might be called "the innocence of sharing", in the meaning of innocence as explained by Oz in the interview at the EG Conference in May 2019. This involved a child-like, unrestrained, and pure joy of creation: Henson simply referred to the works that truly fascinated him and he shared his fascination with his public without any regard to what was profitable, in fashion, or welcome at the given moment. In this way he built a universal communication code and

⁸ It is worth noticing that the golden strings attached to the humans by the gods also remain invisible.

gained a significant degree of accessibility in various age groups, all the more so as the contemporary pop-cultural texts he alluded to soon became widely known and canonical as well (call it his visionary intuition or coincidence, as you wish).

On this backdrop, classical mythology stands out as the most ancient component of Henson's code, one that is particularly adapted to establishing a "network of connections" – a Community of artists and viewers, especially when we realize the nearly worldwide, shared knowledge of the myths and the immeasurable extent of their reception in various spheres of culture across the ages, including the contemporary popular stream.⁹ The importance of the mythological component has been noted by the Internet users who found it worth including in the Muppet Wiki with the following definition:

Greek Mythology is an extensive body of often-contradictory narratives (often because there was no unified Greek culture until the Romans conquered the region), dominated by heroes, deities, and monsters. These myths document aspects of the ancient Greek religion and provide one of the earliest bases of literature. Though most accounts were passed down through the oral-tradition, Greek mythology as it is understood today derives from the written works of such authors as the Greek writer Hesiod, the Roman poet Ovid, the Greek playwright Sophocles, and especially the works of Homer. Such creatures as the cyclops, satyrs, and centaurs have their origins in Greek myth. ([n.d.], s.v. "Greek mythology")

References to ancient myths are present in all the productions by Jim Henson and his heirs. Sometimes they target rather more mature viewers, for you need to be deeply familiar with classical mythology to fully understand such threads as the motif of Marjory the Trash Heap – a large pile of compost in the *Fraggle Rock* (1983–1987), a series about the adventures of the anthropomorphic creatures who inhabit a mysterious system of caves. Marjory performs the function of a kind of oracle: "I'm orange peels, I'm coffee grounds, I'm wisdom!" – she declares.¹⁰ The ancient oracle motif is transferred here from its original and sublime literary context to garbage. This offers an additional layer of humour, but also prompts us to rethink the matter of Fate, freedom, and the deception of appearances.

Similarly, a prior acquaintance with the mythical tradition of the Greeks is required to experience the full range of humour in the construction of the Cyclops in the story *Scheherazade and the Arabian Nights. Musical Drama* (a book and

⁹ In the Muppet universe there are also references to other aspects of the classical tradition, like Aesop's fables ("The Boy Who Cried Wolf" – an episode from the Muppet Classic Theater, dir. David Grossman, 1994) or Elmo's much instructive meeting with [Julius] Caesar Penguin (*Elmo's World*, 2006, cf. Muppet Wiki [n.d.], s.v. "Caesar Penguin").

¹⁰ Cf. Muppet Wiki [n.d.], s.v. "Marjory the Trash Heap". One of Marjory's companion-rats bears the sympathetic Greek name Philo.

a cassette introducing children into classical music, Allen 1991; cf. Muppet Wiki [n.d.], s.v. “Cyclops”). This mythological character gets an “Oriental outfit” and is moved from the Homeric world to a tale from the saga of Sindbad the Sailor. At the same time, however, it should be emphasized that the main layer of amusement is accessible to all, and any “mythological ignorance” of Cyclops’ Greek roots does not have a negative impact on the perception of the scene with the participation of this creature – portrayed as an avid fan of a giant yo-yo.

Moreover, it was none other than Henson’s own team that took care of familiarizing viewers with the original mythological incarnation of the Cyclops and other mythical beasts in the mini-series produced for NBC by Francis Ford Coppola – an adaptation of the *Odyssey* by Andrei Konchalovsky (1997). This production provided the opportunity for a perfect fusion of Henson’s universe with the cosmos of the ancient epics. On the Muppet Wiki website Homer is even acknowledged as one of the writers for the movie ([n.d.], s.v. “The Odyssey”). As a result, viewers can come to know Odysseus’ myth in an exceptionally attractive way. Jim Henson’s Creature Shop prepared not only a terribly appealing Cyclops (featuring also on the series poster and the DVD cover), but many other mythical creatures as well – like Scylla, Charybdis, and even a talking pig from Circe’s homestead.

In this context a distinction is usually made between the Muppets and the Creatures, yet, its essence is replete with paradoxes that reflect the complicated status of the marionettes – an ontological problem dating from Plato’s times. The Muppets are supposed to be “artistic” puppet characters with no aspiration to realism (whether they are “representational”, like Kermit the Frog, or “abstract”, like Cookie Monster), while the Creatures – the animatronic and technically advanced puppets – are designed “to achieve a sense of realism and believability”, as the Muppet Wiki informs us ([n.d.], s.v. “Muppets vs Creatures”). No matter how adequate this distinction may turn out for a future synthesis of the phenomenon of Jim Henson (it is less relevant for the present analysis of the mythological threads,¹¹ and also the Muppet Wiki keeps a distance in this regard), I find it useful to propose a certain clarification here.

As it seems, both groups – the Muppets and the Creatures – in fact do aim at challenging our perception of reality. In the article “Why the Media Won’t Stop Treating the Muppets Like Real People” by Reid Nakamura (2015) we read that Kermit and Miss Piggy have “participated in interviews with outlets that otherwise would not interview fictional characters”.¹² Also the Muppet Wiki – a source that deserves being recalled, as it reflects the views of the engaged public – gives us food for thought with its exquisitely oxymoronic explanation: “Kermit the Frog is not trying to pass as a realistic talking frog, but more as an artistic,

¹¹ Thus “Creature”, with a capital C in this chapter, is distinguished from the common meaning of the word.

¹² On July 13, 2018 Kermit was interviewed by the BBC News (Geoghegan 2018).

almost cartoon-like, character that entertains and captivates audiences” ([n.d.], s.v. “Muppets vs Creatures”). By the sole fact that Kermit is made the subject of this sentence, he acts with full agency. Indeed, the Muppets do not need to “try to pass as real” – for they *are* real with Henson’s audience in a similar meaning as “the carnival sense of the world” (Bakhtin 1968; Elliot 1999, 129) becomes real in certain contexts of society’s functioning. Moreover, while the Creatures are realistic in terms of their belonging to a pre-existing story (as is the case with the talking pig of Circe or other Homeric monsters attested in his epics), the Muppets are the protagonists of their own stories, ones that are becoming mythical before our very eyes. That is also why it is so fascinating when the Muppets interpret the classical myths – not like the Creatures in the *Odyssey*, which somehow “play their roles” from Homer’s scenario, but as actants who enter into a creative dialogue with the ancient heritage, while, paradoxically, the writers, directors, and producers are at the same time appreciated by the viewers and rendered “invisible” – as befits true creators indeed. This is probably what Oz, in the afore-mentioned interview, meant, when he spoke of “bringing things to life” (2019).

The Muppets dealing with Greek Mythology trigger various effects. First of all, the references to myths are a source of humour and a tool for educating a young audience. A perfect implementation of “docere, movere, delectare” – the ancient maxim appreciated by adults, too. And it should be observed that such lessons aim to help children not only to enrich their knowledge of Classical Antiquity, but also to understand contemporary social norms, as well. So, for example, in one of the episodes (108, 1996) of the *Muppets Tonight* (1996–1998), the continuation of the *The Muppet Show* by Henson’s disciples, we witness Zeus meeting the god Thor who tries to use a library without a card.¹³ Even though both of them belong to ancient mythologies, they are not the Creatures but the Muppets, and not only because they are less technically advanced in terms of puppetry art. First of all, they implement their own scenario, which leads to an epic duel of thunder, to the despair of a Muppet librarian. As a result, the viewers of the scene learn the rules for behaving in the library (keep quiet and refrain from epic battles) along with the attributes of these famous ancient gods (hair, beards, clothes, and of course the thunder).

In this very episode we are presented also with the sketch *Murder on the Disoriented Express*. The Muppets confuse Hercule Poirot (played by Jason Alexander) with Hercules, whom they perceive as a mythological Superman. What for the adults is a source of humour – the constant confounding and straitening of the threads of Hercules’ myth – becomes a tool for the light and amusing education of children. There is also another layer, one discernible by viewers somewhat versed in literature: the intertextual dialogue with the iconic works of culture. Such viewers will be pleased to discover that the Muppets

¹³ Cf. also Muppet Wiki [n.d.], s.v. “Thor, God of Thunder”.

allude to the ignorance of Agatha Christie's detective in person. Indeed, from the short stories collection *The Labours of Hercules* (1947), we know that Hercule Poirot had no idea of his mythical patron and he discovered him only owing to Dr. Burton:

'What I understand you to mean is, that in physical appearance I do not resemble a Hercules?' – Dr. Burton's eyes swept over Hercule Poirot, over his small neat person attired in striped trousers, correct black jacket and natty bow tie, swept up from his patent leather shoes to his egg-shaped head and the immense moustache that adorned his upper lip.

'Frankly, Poirot,' said Dr. Burton, 'you don't! I gather,' he added, 'that you've never had much time to study the classics?'

'That is so.'

'Pity. Pity. You've missed a lot. Everyone should be made to study the classics if I had my way.'

Poirot shrugged his shoulders.

'Eh bien, I have got on very well without them.'

'Got on! Got on! It's not a question of getting on. That's the wrong view altogether. The classics aren't a ladder leading to quick success like a modern correspondence course! It's not a man's working hours that are important – it's his leisure hours.' (Christie 1984, 2)

Murder on the Disoriented Express can be interpreted as an answer by Henson's heirs to Dr. Burton's appeal. The leisure hours with the Muppets and classical mythology are time well spent. They abound in a number of hilariously educational scenes with intertextual layers the younger viewers are yet to fully appreciate, and which thereby make Jim Henson's universe a space we can come back to at various stages of our life, ever to discover something revealing there.¹⁴

At this point, it should also be emphasized that the separate productions, irrespectively of the period in which they were created, work together and are complementary. A true *universum* indeed. Thus they consolidate the skills acquired at different phases. This "Muppeteducation" starts very early. While the afore-mentioned *Muppets Tonight* targets the all-ages public, *Abby's Flying Fairy School*, a segment of *Sesame Street*, aims at the youngest viewers. And some joyful lessons in the ancient myths and in social norms are conducted here,

¹⁴ There is much to explore, for example in episode 105 of the *Muppets Tonight* (1996) the ancient god Amor makes Bobo the Bear fall in love with Cindy Crawford and some references to Cyrano de Bergerac can be discovered in this context. In an episode from the *Dinosaurs* series ("Charlene's Flat World", 310/s3e9, 1992) the young protagonist meets an absentminded Muse who tells her – instead of addressing Copernicus – that Earth is round, which triggers serious consequences. Instead, the Muse presents Copernicus with a recipe for brownies (in fact, in Poland the astronomer is believed to have elaborated a recipe for gingerbread and to this day a Toruń sweet factory bears his name).

too.¹⁵ In one of the episodes, the fairy protagonists face the challenge of Pandora’s Lunch Box, during which they learn not to “take things that do not belong to you” (*Sesame Street* 2011, s42e4257; cf. Muppet Wiki [n.d.], s.v. “Episode 4257”). Moreover, they gain knowledge of Pandora and (to a certain point) Medusa, and they practice geometry. So much for the theory, but how is all this achieved in practice? In short, the little creatures cross the bounds of property: they open the mysterious Lunch Box (with an image of Medusa riding Pegasus, cf. Fig. 1) and get attacked by diverse kinds of food that are defeated only after their shapes are adjusted to the relevant “holes”.



Fig. 1: *Sesame Street*, *Pandora’s Lunch Box*, 2011, screenshot by K. M. from YouTube official sneak peek.

Riddles become a key to the action also in a short film (2015) from the Crumby Pictures series of parodies of the famous movies. In this case the “victim” of the parody is the iconic production of the mythological “sword and sandals”-style, hinted at in the very title of the short film: *Sesame Street: Nosh of the Titans* (*Clash of the Titans Parody*). This film is focused on memory games. First, a trailer-like narrator’s baritone voice introduces the protagonist: “Ancient stories tell of a hero born a monster, son of Zeus...”. The creature in question – our hero – turns out to be a Greekish incarnation of Cookie Monster. He bears a fitting name – Furseus, while his best friend and sidekick Pegafish looks exactly as it is called. Furseus is invited by his father to the Mount Olympus Diner. However, the road leading there is blocked by a charming Moo-dusa that is – again as her name suggests – a cow with a snakeish hairdress (cf. Fig. 2, next page). To overcome her, Furseus has to prove his good memory during the Find the Lady game (instead of the Lady there are cookies, of course). He wins and reaches Olympus, where he is warmly welcomed by Zeus, who is duly proud of his son. The king of the gods orders, “Release the cracker!” A humungous cookie then appears and the feast begins.

¹⁵ For example Morty the Musical Muse teaches his young beastly pupils (fairies, trolls, a half gerbil and half unicorn, etc.) to love music and play musical instruments.



Fig. 2: Sesame Street, *Nosh of the Titans – Pegafish, Furseus, and Moo-dusa*, 2015, screenshot by K. M. from YouTube official show.

This production is a perfect implementation of the double address (Wall 1991) in Henson’s universe. While the game in itself is very simple and targeted at small children in their early educational phase,¹⁶ the attractive framework of a famous blockbuster for a young adult and adult public (including Furseus’ philosophical comment after Moo-dusa freezes herself: “Now that dramatic irony...”) permits all-ages entertainment.

A similar phenomenon of the double address manifests itself in a production that seems to be intended for the youngest exclusively – namely, the cartoon *Muppet Babies* (1989¹⁷), an animated spin-off which followed the overwhelming success of *The Muppet Show*. The episode *Babes in Troyland* (s6e15) brings the little protagonists to the famous Homeric city, where they construct a wooden Trojan Chicken, with Miss Piggy as a new incarnation of Helen, that is “Piggy of Troy”. Before this happens, none other than Kermit himself sets in motion the whole chain of events, the results of which is the “Muppetization” of classical mythology. For the story of the Trojan War is but one of the impressive number of myths re-created and performed by the Muppet Babies in this barely 25-minute-episode.

In the beginning there was an image – a video tape about various mythical tales Scooter had watched when unable to sleep. First, the flight of Icarus is mentioned – after all, this is one of the most popular Greek myths and it speaks to the young public particularly well, with the boy’s defiance and careless enthusiasm. The Muppet Babies, owing to the power of their imagination, enter the roles of the mythological characters. Fortunately for Gonzo,¹⁸ who becomes

¹⁶ It is noteworthy that this very game is very popular in adult gambling.

¹⁷ In 2018 a reboot of *Muppet Babies* was launched on Disney Junior and the Disney Channel with 20 episodes and a special so far.

¹⁸ “Gonzo”, of course, means wild, crazy, recklessly bold.

the Muppet Baby Icarus, there is a pillow nearby, on which he can fall safely, taken care of by the Nanny. She stands for their adult supervisor and provides the feeling of safety (we never see her face – for each child it will be the face of their own tutor), yet she gives the Muppet Babies quite a lot of liberty in discovering the world. It is the Nanny who, having arranged the space in which Icarus does not die, presents the little creatures with a book on Greek mythology, with a head of Medusa on its cover. At Kermit's request, she also gives them a simple definition of myth – it is “a very old story”. Kermit wishes to know more myths and his desire meets with the enthusiasm of his friends. The Nanny has no time for a storytelling session, but the video tape is still available and the Muppet Babies start watching. This motif reflects perfectly the typical for our times introduction of the youngest to the ancient heritage – that is, via visual culture. However, it should be stressed that books are ever present in Henson's universe – here as well: in the movie within the movie – the one the Muppet Babies watch. Scooter, as the creature with the richest mythological experience, incarnates as the god Pan and becomes their guide through the world of myths. His attribute (next to the Pan flute) is nothing other than the volume the Nanny showed to them.

First, Scooter tells his friends the myth of Pandora and he explains to them the concept of gods/goddesses (“big guys and ladies that hung out on Mount Olympus and make a lot of trouble for everybody”). Soon the borders between the movie on the myths and the Muppet Babies' reality blur and Pandora becomes Piggdora, annoyed with the fact she cannot marry Prometheus-Kermitious, but rather is supposed to bond with his brother, Epimetheus-Fazzius. The situation requires a quick change of subject and this is exactly where the motif of the mythical beasts is introduced. Scooter mentions the Minotaur, defined as “half man, half bull” and “one of the most monstrous beasts ever to walk the Earth”. The Muppet Babies are impressed (not scared) and listen to their friend eagerly. They learn that the Minotaur “belonged to King Minos, who kept it hidden in a complicated maze”. The Minotaur's origin is not a theme to be delved into here for obvious reasons, while the term “Labyrinth” is absent probably because it could be too difficult for little viewers. Yet the producers' predilection for intertextual dialogue of the transmedial kind offers an exquisite piece of experience to the older audience – two images of the maze in the cartoon are exact replicas of the constructions from Henson's most important movie *The Labyrinth* (1986, see below), including the interior designed after Maurits Cornelis Escher's lithograph *Relativity* (1953), which fact multiplies the layers of intertextuality and the challenges for the viewers, who again are encouraged to return to Henson's universe at different stages of life.

Gonzo wishes to take a picture of the Minotaur in its maze-labyrinth. He looks into Scooter's book and there he finds the most famous hybrids of Greek mythology: a centaur, defined as “half man, half horse”, the Sphinx called “half bird, half lion”, and Medusa with her “laser eyes”. Gonzo finds the book “very

handy” and next he, his friend Camilla the Chicken, and Scooter-Pan open various doors in the maze in the hope of finding the Minotaur. Unfortunately, there is a dragon, a two-headed dog, and the Cyclops, but not even a trace of the “half man, half bull”. The Muppet Babies experience no fear and address the monsters politely. These are rather shy and respond with similar politeness – except for the dragon, who does not know how to react and succumbs to his instinct to breathe fire. The Cyclops proves to be the most helpful, for he promises “to keep an eye” on the Minotaur, at least before he is blinded by the flash of Gonzo’s camera. The group encounters also Medusa (captured partly in a model animation technique that can be considered homage to Ray Harryhausen – the father of the slow-motion “dynamation”, used in *Jason and the Argonauts*, dir. Don Chaffey, 1963, and *The Clash of the Titans*, dir. Desmond Davis, 1981). Her presence is preannounced by the comically ominous statue of a pizza man. Again, Gonzo’s camera causes havoc – it makes Medusa petrify herself. An additional source of humour is Gonzo’s comment on her strange hair style.

Finally, the Minotaur appears in a quiet corner. Camilla and Scooter are about to run away, but Gonzo makes an unexpected move. He decides the monster is shy and he draws the Minotaur behind a screen, where it gets full female makeup and is dressed like an actress from a cabaret show. Gonzo, for his part, puts on an elegant tux and starts dancing with the Minotaur, singing romantically to it: “The monster of my dreams is you...”. This bold cross-dressing and trans-gendery farce tames the beast, overcoming his initial unwillingness to take part in the show. After the passionate tango, when Gonzo says “thank you” to his partner, the Minotaur responds in a courteous yet adamant baritone: “No, thank *you*”. This carnivalesque acculturation through art that boldly transcends the traditional social structure not only makes the Minotaur a not-at-all-dangerous creature (with the effect repeated later in Harry Potter’s scene of Boggey the half Snape, half Neville’s grandma), but also let it, or rather him, stop babbling incoherently and gain his own rational and attractive voice – a trait considered, since Antiquity (Aristotle, *Politics* 1253a), the distinctive marker of the human being.

Inspired by the story, Animal also voices his¹⁹ own monstrous identity by declaring to the Nanny, who comes to check on her charge: “Me monster”, as if searching with her for a kind of validation, but she neither confirms or denies, permitting the creature to build his own identity freely (“Oh, I see”, she says). In Muppet “adulthood”, Animal, as the drummer and the connoisseur of paintings

¹⁹ Animal is definitely defined as “he”, not “it”, cf. Muppet Wiki [n.d.], s.v. “Animal (Muppet)”.

(especially by Rembrandt and Renoir),²⁰ will also be closely linked with art, at the same time maintaining his fierce self. Henson and his team do their best to avoid stereotypes. The power of imagination that is at the base of artistic creations helps to cross the barriers between different beings. The Muppet Babies do not wish to catch the Minotaur, in order to imprison him and use this creature for profit as was typical for the “freak shows”. Rather, they wish only to know him – to meet the Other in the aim of developing their own understanding of the world. Monsters should be approached with courage, good will, and respect. And if you talk to them, they may even respond to you.

The dialogue with the mythical beasts in Henson’s universe reveals an important message. The Muppets draw on Greek mythology to show the children, and the adults too, what really matters. Though it may sound like clichéd banalities, it is friendship, love, and peace in the world. As early as in the 1980s Henson and his heirs – working in the very heart of show business on a global scale – anticipated the risks of consumerism and money-oriented culture. This message, so strongly present in the *Muppet Babies*, returns in other productions, including the works carried out after Henson’s death. For example, in one of the stories staged for the *Muppet Classic Theater* (1994) directed by David Grossman, Kermit impersonates King Midas who catches Gonzo – here in his “adult” incarnation of the Satyr – sleeping in the King’s roses. This is a crime punishable by death. Kermit-Midas, however, shows mercy and the Satyr then rewards him with a wish. He wishes for peace in the world, but his Queen, Miss Piggy, has another idea and she asks for the Golden Touch for her husband. In consequence, after a series of gags and slapsticks, the King turns himself into gold (cf. also H. 2012). Piggy consults different specialists, but to no avail. Only her declaration of feelings straight from her heart brings Kermit back to life. True to their carnivalesque nature, the Muppets turn the ancient myth upside down (it is Midas who is the victim of not-his-own greed) to convey the message of love.

These lessons in social norms, emotions, and mythology, wicked and completely free of tedious didacticism, teach the public that indeed one frog – or any other creature (also human beings, both young and old) capable of finding within themselves, at least in certain circumstances, altruistic sentiments – can make a

²⁰ In *The Great Muppet Caper* – a musical movie directed by Henson (1981) – Animal reveals his passion for impressionist paintings; cf. the following dialogue:

Kermit: ‘What’s wrong with the drummer? He looks a little crazed.’

Zoot: ‘Oh, he’s just upset about missing the Rembrandt exhibit at The National Gallery.’

Animal: [Shouting to correct him] ‘Renoir!!’

(cf. Muppet Wiki [n.d.], s.v. “Pierre-Auguste Renoir” and “The Great Muppet Caper” [Quotes]). The thread of Animal’s love for Renoir is re-used in one of the 2018 episodes of the *Muppet Babies* reboot, cf. Muppet Wiki [n.d.], s.v. “You Ought to Be in Pictures”.

difference. This message is presented symbolically on the cover of the book *Kermit's Guide to Life in the '90s* (Riger 1993), advertised as “Kermit’s first book for adults” (cf. Fig. 3).

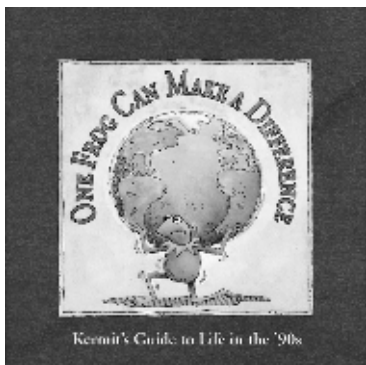


Fig. 3: Cover of *One Frog Can Make a Difference: Kermit's Guide to Life in the '90s* by Robert P. Riger, ill. by Tom Payne, New York, NY: Pocket Books, Muppet Wiki.



Lee Lawrie and Rene Paul Chambellan, *Atlas*, Rockefeller Center, New York, phot. Hede2000 [Jorgen], Wikimedia Commons.

The famous frog poses on the cover as the mythical Atlas.²¹ He carries the globe’s weight with full focus and dedication, while his half-kneeling position is presumed to be modelled after the bronze statue of Atlas by Lee Lawrie and Rene Paul Chambellan from the Rockefeller Center in New York (1937) – a commercial complex built by America’s most famous financier and philanthropist (cf. Fig. 4). What is interesting, on the official website of the Center, the presentation of the sculpture is provided with the following quote by John D. Rockefeller Jr.:

I believe that love is the greatest thing in the world; that it alone can overcome hate; that right can and will triumph over might. (Rockefeller [n.d.])

Kermit-Midas could sign on to this with both of his green hands. Moreover, in his case the task of holding the globe is not a punishment. This is a beautiful homage paid to Henson by his collaborators. Thus did they honour their master and friend who had given Kermit his voice and performed him personally. This symbolically shows also the true foundation of the world according to Henson – the world in which the tiniest and the humblest count.

²¹ The references to the myth of Atlas are quite popular in Henson’s universe. For other examples see Muppet Wiki [n.d.], s.v. “Atlas”.

Nosce te ipsum, or The Storyteller: Greek Myths

The fact that Henson decided to give the Muppets a voice – the crucial attribute defining a human being, if we should believe Aristotle (*Politics* 1253a) and Cicero (*De inventione* 1.1–4) – leads us to another important aspect at the font of Henson and his collaborators’ success: the art of storytelling. Not without reason is Frank Oz, in numerous official presentations, introduced as an actor, a director, and... a storyteller (cf., e.g., Oz 2019). For indeed, Henson’s team managed to revive the ancient power of the oral all-ages narrative and adjust it to television – the medium that moved into almost every household the world over in the second half of the twentieth century (cf. Oz 2017). This oral-tale aspect, with the Word being what matters, is detectable in various types of Henson’s productions, but of course it gives a very special effect when applied to the topics that originate from the oral tradition: folktales and the ancient myths, as recreated in the TV mini-series *The Storyteller*.

The elaboration of this series coincided with the preparation of the “synthesis of all of Henson’s creative work” (Holste 2012, 118) – namely, the full screen movie *The Labyrinth*, an opus exceptionally rich in folklore and mythological references (see the next part of this chapter). Henson also made use of his family’s intergenerational inspirations, i.e. the ideas by his daughter Lisa who graduated then *summa cum laude* with a degree in classical Greek mythology (incl. a folklore course) from Harvard University (Finch 1993, 191; Block and Erdmann [2016], 19). The first season of *The Storyteller*, directed by Henson and his colleagues, and written by Anthony Minghella, aired in 1987 and comprised nine folktales, all united by the same human narrator – in this role, John Hurt – and a puppet dog played by Henson’s son Brian. In the second season, developed by Anthony Minghella (with script by Nigel Williams), directed by David Garfath, John Madden, Tony Smith, and Paul Weiland, and broadcast shortly after Henson’s passing in 1990, *The Storyteller: Greek Myths*, the team plays with the ancient heritage. As Nathaniel Long observes – the author of the only in-depth study on this series I am aware of – “[t]hat Jim Henson and the Creature Shop would excel at crafting the beastly menagerie of these old stories goes without saying, but the idea that such material should prove a natural fit for Henson’s artistic style is more insightful” (2012, 161).

Indeed, the first portion of food for thought is offered already by the varied attitude to the two seasons. While the first one is defined as a “noble failure” (evidence gathered by Long, *ibid.*, 162) with some appreciation for the folklore component that “is allowed greater freedom to mutate and to become more contemporary” (167), the mythological season, due to the stereotypical perception of Classical Antiquity as a petrified legacy of the past, met with harsh criticism. A production “relegated to almost total obscurity” and “a footnote to a footnote” – these terms used in its regard suggest a meek “spin-off” of no particular importance (161–162). The less favourable attitude to mythology as

movie material in this context might also result from the conviction of its “austerity and antiquity” (172). As such, myths were considered appropriate rather for “high culture” than for all-ages entertainment, notwithstanding their function to build “the only universally recognizable poetic and iconic language available” for both streams (170).

That today there is no doubt that mythology can lay the foundations for pop-cultural audiovisual blockbusters, like full-screen movies or computer games, we owe to some degree to Henson and his team’s work on *The Storyteller*. He pursued his vision against what was in fashion and again he anticipated strong, even predominant cultural trends – a possible answer to why the series was not appreciated at the moment of its airing as much as it deserved. Only now have we begun to see the groundbreaking character of this production – and indeed, a remake has been commissioned to the hands of one of the most significant authors for popular culture – Neil Gaiman (cf. Andreeva 2019).²²

The biggest achievement of *The Storyteller* lies in the fact that its team managed to bring myths to a contemporary audience by drawing on their greatest power – their dramatic force, precisely what had made them the base for the Greek tragedies. As Long observes, the tales of *The Storyteller: Greek Myths* “evoke the very real heartbreak” of the ancient drama. They are not a surrogate, but a “dark and disturbing” narration (2012, 167), aimed at challenging our stereotypical beliefs and false sense of security. This assumption seems to find corroboration in the words by Oz who summed up his experience of work on *The Storyteller: Greek Myths* in a *Behind the Scenes* reportage: “It was great because it worked for emotions” (The Jim Henson Company 2010). Indeed, while the choice of themes has been adjusted to a young audience, the exquisitely tragic pity and fear, evoked through the elaboration of these themes, are just as shattering for viewers of all ages.

The person of the Storyteller, who as the narrator unites all the tales in the second season, as well, contributes to the amplification of their dramatic potential in a very special way. This demanding role had been offered to the great Shakespearian actor Michael Gambon. His outstanding performance gives – as Long acutely notes – additional flavour to the entertainment of those who actively follow cultural events. Namely, when he says: “The Gods play with us”, his world-famous creation as King Lear of 1982 is evoked (Long 2012, 171): “As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods. / They kill us for their sport” (4.1.42–43). Owing to this intertextual connection the universal dimension of classical mythology manifests itself particularly clearly to the viewers who are well versed in artistic life or know that Henson’s universe is full of encrypted messages and take the challenge of deciphering them.

²² At present *The Storyteller: Greek Myths* enjoys 8.2 out of 10 stars on the Internet Movie Data Base (as of December 2019). On the series cf. also Rebis 2018.

At the same time, as the Storyteller in the second season is not a noble *aoidos*, but “a thief and grifter”, it is assumed that there is no flow between him and his tales and that the “continuity is less or more meaningless” (Long 2012, 166). Yet, the very fact that he wanders through the Labyrinth (yes, the “original” one, on Crete, even though in ruins after the Minotaur’s death), where he draws inspiration from abandoned items and artefacts, makes him a participant to all the stories. And he is an Athenian (i.e. from the fatherland of Daedalus and the tragedy), and a fellow Greek is also his Dog, who builds the next unifying element of the season.

According to Long, the choice of the Dog as the leading animal is not accidental, for dogs are a typical companion both of kings and beggars (172). Defined as “an audience surrogate”, the Dog also represents the point of view of the young public, hence its frequent comments, questions, and emotional exclamations (164), like when it – or rather: he – realizes that Danaë and Zeus in the form of golden rain make love (“Oh! So that’s how it’s done!”, Long 2012, 167). It is worth observing that the Dog in the second season is also animated by Brian, one of the bearers of his father’s legacy. While it can be concluded that “[t]he question whether it is the same dog [as in the folktales season] is almost immaterial” (172), it may be indeed the case that this animal unifies the whole production.²³ In the last episode of the first season, *The Death and the Soldier*, the Dog reveals his Greek origins in a particular way. The not-Greek, “folk” Storyteller (performed superbly by John Hurt) recalls the reaction of the people to the imprisonment of the Death:

The news, whispered from one of the Czar’s fifty wives to the next, spread through the town as fast as gossip, which is what it was, and nothing spreads faster. And within four and a half minutes the whole town knew and within seventeen minutes the whole country knew and by the following morning it was the talking point in a thousand languages. Death a prisoner! Morte un prigioniero! Tod ein Gefanger! Smird ooznizen! (17:30)

After this enumeration the Storyteller makes a dramatic pause and confesses: “I forgot the Greek”. This is the moment when the Dog comes to help: “Ekhmalotisame ton thanato!”, he offers. In spite of different variants of the transcription,²⁴ there is no doubt that the Dog speaks in Modern Greek. Of course some more classically inclined fans of mythology might prefer to hear Ancient Greek at this point, but the contemporary, common form of the language fits

²³ The plan was to create a Cerberus-Muppet, but due to problems with the screenplay (it was not clear how the single heads should interact so not to cause confusion and distract viewers from the main plot), the Dog from the first season was “hired”, and this created a good, even if unexpected, link between the two storytelling circles.

²⁴ I follow here the DVD edition of 2005 and the novelization of the stories by Henson and Minghella (2014, 67).

better the context of a folktale and it provides a natural continuity between the old and new times. Thus the Dog – a Muppet animal gifted with the human ability to speak (even a polyglot!) – is situated in the series at the crossroads between the people and other creatures, and he fulfils also the important function of providing comfort in the course of narration, and in the second season especially. For, interestingly enough, while most of the creatures from this season are also able to talk, the interaction they have to offer is sinister both for the protagonists and the public. Not only because they can physically kill the heroes, but also because they reveal the monstrosity lurking in the human soul.

In the subsequent section of my chapter I will briefly present the crucial monsters from all four episodes of *The Storyteller: Greek Myths* (Minghella 1990) by following the order of the DVD edition of 2005 (different from their first arrangement). It opens with the myth of Daedalus and Icarus and while the narration is focused on the boy and his father, the story gives a framework for the whole season, as it regards the life of the architect of the Labyrinth – the space through which the Storyteller and his Dog wander at the time of their “storytelling sessions” and, earlier, in the mythical era, the prison of the Minotaur, to whom the last episode will be dedicated.

It should be emphasized that already this first episode offers important inputs. The clever construction of the Labyrinth visually resembles a brain, while the Minotaur is introduced as “a very special creature” and called a “curse of [the] family” of Minos (09:45–55). At a certain point we can even catch a glimpse of it, and this increases our curiosity, which however will be satisfied only once we become acquainted with other stories, ones preparing us for the grand finale.

What is also worth stressing is the fact that the Storyteller presents the whole myth of the famous father–son couple, from the murder of the brilliant boy Talos committed by Daedalus who was envious and also disappointed with the clumsy Icarus (the crime takes place in a moment of madness catalyzed by a talking vulture). Talos’ death, usually omitted in the elaborations for children (and for adults too), is indeed crucial for grasping the tragic essence of this myth in the context of the metaphysical chain of crimes and punishments. And this is a particularly bitter essence according to the series, as the very idea of constructing the wings and flying is attributed here to Talos. Daedalus puts it into practice and inadvertently propels his son to death. As the Storyteller observes: “I think when Talos dropped from the sad heights above Athens, Icarus was already falling. As if a single thread held them all together. Talos fell. Icarus fell. Daedalus fell” (15:43).

The architect ends in Sicily, yet his life is vegetative, moribund: one would prefer “quick death, not the slow dying inside” (22:10), the Storyteller remarks. Daedalus “buried his child, his love, and hope, and joy” (16:37), and the only moment he smiles is the time spent with Cocalus’ daughters for whom he makes amazing marionettes. The message of this myth, nearly always interpreted in the context of a conflict between young and old, in Henson’s universe resonates with

the conclusion drawn from King Midas-Kermit's misadventure: only the love of our near and dear counts. The Storyteller questions all we know or expect from one of the most popular myths. In his eyes, ones that also become the eyes of viewers, the genius Daedalus perhaps was "not so clever after all" (18:16).²⁵ All this introduces an early element of doubt, also in regard to other common interpretations of the myths, including the damnation of the Minotaur.

The second episode recounts the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice and the Storyteller shows it again from a surprising angle: "Sometimes the story doesn't end with two people falling in love, it starts there" (07:05; cf. also Long 2012, 169). Having known the rest, the Dog still expects an optimistic tale: "And they walked into the sunlight and were happy ever after", he suggests hopefully, but the Storyteller quickly deprives his companion of illusions: "They didn't" – he answers (19:56). The originality of this approach manifests itself especially during Orpheus' journey through the Underworld. This motif seems to offer a perfect opportunity for showing the mastery of Henson's puppetry art in presenting the whole bestiary of the mythical monsters. Yet we encounter only Cerberus, and still not directly, in Hades' kingdom. The three-headed dog is barely mentioned. Such "economical" use of the creatures' workshop (be it also because of budgetary limitations) has a majeure reason. The focus on the visually attractive monsters would distract the viewers' attention from the central issue – the artist's drama.²⁶ That is why the only non-human creature presented more fully in the story is the Satyr Aristaos, whose lust triggers the tragedy. For it is during her desperate escape from Aristaos that Eurydice (a dryad herself, though she does not differ from the people in the episode, except for her higher sensitivity to art) is bitten by a viper. Aristaos and his relatives – the centaurs, fauns, and other satyrs – are presented as dangerous. They resemble humans, but from before the "acculturation" phase. They do not control their instincts. They are said to be "given up to pleasure, hairy, and unpredictable" (08:07). At this point the Dog reduces some tension that is rising from the undoubtedly sexual context of the scene, even if partly beyond the awareness of the younger viewers, and he cries: "Like me!" (08:10). The Storyteller is sceptical and answers: "Hairy anyway" (08:14). He also adds that the satyrs "understand only pleasure. In the face of pain they are like children alone in the dark" (09:49). This story again finishes with the loss of a dearest one – a loss that nothing can make up for. The whole world and art, as important for Orpheus as science for Daedalus, suddenly become meaningless.

²⁵ This bitter verdict Daedalus gives on himself.

²⁶ At this point it is worth observing that, again against expectations, Hades and Persephone are the only gods present in the series (Zeus features as a Divine Power with no shape). Hades, who tells Orpheus: "Fear me. I am the bored audience at the theatre" (15:15), makes him, to quote Long, "the avatar for all failed and troubled artists, one whose gifts can evoke miracles or horrors" (2012, 169).

The third episode retells the myth of Perseus and Medusa. For the first time in the season the Storyteller focuses on a mythical beast as such. Already in the opening of the movie he and the Dog run into some statues – Medusa’s victims – and her own petrified head. When the Dog wishes to come to know the origin of the monster, the Storyteller tells him her myth. Medusa is defined as a cursed woman living at the end of the world. Thus, the Ovidian version merges with Hesiod’s account. The detailed description of her appearance (“wings of bronze and breath as foul as corpses; her hair a nest of poisonous snakes”, 01:29) is accompanied by sophisticated visual effects. Then we are transferred to the brass prison of Danaë, where she encounters Zeus in the form of a golden rain depicted after the famous painting by Gustav Klimt. Danaë gives birth to Perseus and while raising him in her prison, she tells the boy about Medusa. The monster seems to feel their future nod of fates. The lens of the narration switches between Perseus and Medusa who keeps on calling him. After the boy is discovered by his grandfather Acrisius and thrown with Danaë to the sea, his connection with Medusa grows, culminating in Perseus’ expedition to fetch her head for the evil king Polydectes. The young hero learns how to get to Medusa’s lair from the Titan Atlas, whom he will later petrify with the monster’s head to end his suffering, which constitutes an original reinterpretation of this mythological motif, one that brings forth the concept of compassion. Unexpectedly for the Dog (and a certain part of the public no doubt, too) it turns out that Medusa is only one of three Gorgons. The Storyteller offers an explanation of his fragmentary accounts:

If I told you the whole story your head would burst. There is no one story. There are branches, rooms, like this place. Rooms, corridors, dead ends. [...] Oracles are true. Stories are true. There are monsters at the end of the world. (18:12–22:37)

Long justly calls this explanation “a thesis statement on the series” (2012, 169). This is also the general principle of retelling the myths. We get enchanted and lured into the never-ending labyrinth of mythology. We wander through it since childhood, if we are lucky to meet a great storyteller to introduce us to this heritage early enough (be s/he a family member, an author of our favourite collection of the myths, or Jim Henson). With the passing of years we discover new tales or some new aspects of the old tales we thought we knew very well, and when we meet monsters at the end of the world, we may even prove ourselves sufficiently mature to listen to their story and understand them – a bit. We can also understand the decision of the Storyteller to omit Andromeda’s thread in his retelling of the myth of Perseus and Medusa. For he focuses on the tragic fate of Acrisius who had wished for a male descendant and then feared him so much that he sent him for an apparently certain death. But the Fate runs her own game with the people and finally Acrisius dies from Perseus’ hand indeed, when the young man accidentally throws a discus into his head – a

tragedy that immerses all in deep grief. While Perseus is usually considered the only Greek hero who at last achieves happiness and peace of mind, in Henson's world the damage of his family ties is too heavy to permit a happy end.

The Storyteller's meta-literary remark on mythology as a labyrinthine structure brings us back also to the Labyrinth as such – the construction we know from the first episode on Daedalus and Icarus and from the main setting of all the four tales. The last episode, visually very refined,²⁷ retells the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur – the most famous monster of Classical Antiquity. Here the element of surprise is present, as well. It consists in putting into question the concept of monstrosity as resulting from the visible otherness of the dangerous and terrifying creature that exists against the laws of Nature. Also the behaviour of the handsome and apparently valiant Theseus raises serious moral doubts as the narration evolves. In the Storyteller's interpretation, he turns out to be a monster inside, one maybe even more dreadful than the Minotaur itself.

The key to this kind of re-reading of the Cretan myth is offered again by the adoption of a perspective focused on family ties. When we see the Minotaur closer for the first time, the creature – defined with the “it” pronoun as a beast and presented as a horrible “half man, half bull” hungry for human flesh – submits to Ariadne, its half sister. She regularly visits the Minotaur, “care[s] for it, pitie[s] it”, and she tells it about the world outside of the Labyrinth – its prison (03:16). The Minotaur seems to respond to Ariadne's presence, even permitting her to touch it. Yet the girl, as soon as Theseus arrives to Crete, wishes him to kill her half brother. The first reason is egocentric: the Minotaur “shames my family, shames me”, but the second one is more complex: “What life does it have in the dark?” – the princess asks sadly (14:38), as if putting herself in the situation of the imprisoned monster.

The chase through the Labyrinth starts and the tension rises so much that the Dog cannot bear it. For both the Minotaur and Theseus are at the same time the hunter and the prey. Finally it is Theseus who wins. He hits the beast, who falls to the floor and lies there bleeding. The Athenian then has the impression it is “almost human” (15:00–17:10). In this scene I can see clear inspiration by Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Tanglewood Tales* (1853) and his groundbreaking interpretation of the Minotaur as a tormenting, yet also a tormented being.²⁸ On the verge of death, Hawthorne's beast seems to speak the human tongue, and it calls out to its mother. Henson's team goes a step further in their *aemulatio* – the

²⁷ There are animated scenes from Greek vases (a possible inspiration for Disney's *Hercules* of 1993?). The episode is also rich in less known threads, like Medea's presence in Athens.

²⁸ In Hawthorne's retelling it is Minos who proves to be the most terrible monster. For an in-depth analysis of the Minotaur see the Part I of the present volume – “In the Maze of Youth: Meeting the Minotaur”, and in particular the chapter by Sheila Murnaghan with Deborah H. Roberts, “«A Kind of Minotaur»: Literal and Spiritual Monstrosity in the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne”.

Minotaur appears to address all its family members: “Mother... Father... Brother... Sister...” (16:57). Ariadne, who is present at the scene, starts crying: “No! Don’t! Don’t kill him. He’s my brother... Please, he’s my brother” (17:10). The change of the pronoun from “it” to “he” should be highlighted here – the Minotaur is given human identity and Ariadne touches his head tenderly – the head that is the visual marker of his monstrosity and the transgression of Nature’s laws. Theseus, however, knows no pity. The Dog shares Ariadne’s feelings and asks the Storyteller: “Did Theseus have to kill him? Couldn’t he be tamed?” (18:03). But the young Athenian was not interested in taming. He needed to kill a beast to gain his fame as a hero. But in the end it turns out that the heroism that is so achieved, is merely a mirage. The finale transforms into what Long calls a “harsh psychological drama” (2012, 167). The Minotaur, despised and rejected, is more human and we pity this creature, while Theseus is an anti-hero and a promise-breaker who cares only about himself. He failed his mother, to whom he had promised to come back; he failed his father who had waited in vain for a white sail, and he failed Ariadne with his false proposal of a lasting marriage. The phrase “I promise” echoes through the whole episode, as the Athenian breaks his ties with those who love him one by one. In the last scene, when Theseus puts on his crown, its horny shape reveals that the real monster lurks in his heart:

Many nights he would dream of wandering through the widening corridors of his palace, looking as he had done once before for a monster to kill, but in the dream it was always his mother, or his father, or his wife he killed. And when he caught his own reflection, he had the monster’s face. (22:40)

Indeed, nothing is at it appears and thus we need to travel deep into ourselves to discover who (or what) we really are – as both Henson and the ancient Delphic maxim, γνῶθι σαυτόν, “know thyself”, teach us.

Si fractus illabatur orbis, or The Labyrinth

A spiritual journey through the land of myths is also the theme of the movie *Labyrinth* – the most spectacular failure of Henson – or so it seemed shortly after the premiere on June 27, 1986. This was a mighty blow, as *The Labyrinth* was at the same time the most personal of his works (Block and Erdmann [2016], 67), and Henson never got over the critical reviews. He searched for comfort in each tiny piece of favourable judgment (“[...] the reaction varies by country”, he maintained, 179) and he kept his unshaken faith in the high value of this production, while trying to explain its rejection in the USA with the simultaneous débuts of other blockbusters (*Top Gun* and *Karate Kid 2*) that would have overshadowed this crown of his life’s achievement. He also blamed the stereotypical attitude to movies for children with female protagonists:

People thought it was a kids' film. Also the main character was a young girl, but most of the films that do well in the US have young boys as main characters. And when a boy and a girl want to see different films, they'll compromise by both seeing the one with the boy in it. (in Block and Erdmann [2016], 179–180)

The movie's co-producer George Lucas saw the source of the criticism towards *The Labyrinth* exactly in Henson's not fitting the mainstream (180). Also here he stood out as a pioneer of the cultural (r)evolution. (Let's observe that he chose for his protagonist a female teenager ten years before Joanne K. Rowling was still compelled to hide her gender identity for fear the marketing specialists had in regard to the sales rate, had Harry Potter been advertized as a woman's novel.) As befitted a true visionary, Henson foresaw his success – in his documents a memo to his staff has been found with the following statement: “Both the adult and children's audiences seemed to really enjoy this film” (172). Due to his premature death he never had the opportunity to observe the wave of growing interest in the movie after its VHS edition. Now it enjoys a cult following and the copyright holders respond to the fans' needs with the whole repertoire of transmedia potential: next to an old novelization by A. C. H. Smith (1986, republished 2014) and the special 30th-anniversary DVD and Blue-ray editions, there are several manga series, board games, albums, calendars, door knockers, collectible figurines, T-shirts, exhibitions,²⁹ etc., accompanied by a number of the community initiatives, like fan fiction, graffiti, *The Labyrinth Masquerade Ball*, and Lego constructions.

Despite the passage of all these years, *The Labyrinth* still maintains its original character in comparison to other works of culture and is still difficult to categorize. Scholars place it between a “fantasy-adventure” and “a psychological parable about growing up” (White 1993, 118), a hybrid genre with some traits of a film musical. It also offers a novelty on the emotional plan. As Brian Henson recalls, his father wished to combine a dark mystical tone with the comic spirit typical of the Muppet shows (Block and Erdmann [2016], 12). In the work on the scenario Joseph Campbell's book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), very much appreciated also by Lucas,³⁰ played an important role, along with Lisa Henson's afore-mentioned fascination with classical mythology (Block and Erdmann [2016], 19). The initial impulse was provided by Brian Froud's vision

²⁹ For example, in 2016 The Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta (GA) hosted the exhibition *Jim Henson's Labyrinth: Journey to Goblin City*, on the 30th anniversary of the movie's premiere, while in 2014 some of Jareth's props and outfits were to be seen in Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin, at an exhibition devoted to David Bowie. In 2019 it was possible to visit an exhibition *Jim Henson: Imagination Unlimited* in the Center of Science and Industry (Columbus, OH).

³⁰ In this context, Lucas called *The Labyrinth* “a classic story”, cf. Block and Erdmann [2016], 41; cf. also Saunders 1986; The Jim Henson Company 2015; Geringer and Satchell 2017.

of a child sitting among the Goblins. He recalls the disturbing character of this scene, with the child “seemingly threatened, but [...] utterly relaxed, and actually a part of that strange world” (21).³¹ Taking up this thread, Jim Henson created a unique and wicked amalgam (he collaborated with Terry Jones from Monty Python at the final stage, 30–37), with human and animal actors and puppets of various kinds, produced with the use of both traditional craftwork and the highest technology then available (the only computer not in military service in Los Angeles, 175).

The movie is based on the classical motif of a hero’s journey, except this time it is a heroine who is on a quest. Sarah escapes from the problems of everyday life into the realm of fantasy. Her stepmother – in the girl’s eyes nearly as cruel as the stepmothers in the fairy tales – makes her babysit her half brother Toby. Exasperated, Sarah wishes for the Goblins to take the boy away. Her wish comes true and the girl – only then aware of the consequences of her request – has to go through the magical maze to save the child from the Goblin King Jareth, played by the charismatic David Bowie. She has thirteen hours to complete her mission, conquering her weaknesses in a clear allegory of coming-of-age.

The movie has the structure of a story within a story and is full of meta-textual references on various levels (cf. Geringer and Satchell 2017, 01:14:42), which is symbolically suggested already by the title of the book Sarah reads in the first scene: *The Labyrinth*. This is the book that inspires her to form her sinister wish. The duplication of the movie’s title is a hint for the viewers to search for and to track other signs, like the faces of Bowie-the Goblin King hidden in the Labyrinth – a sophisticated construction that reflects Escher’s optic illusory lithographs (the Dutch artist is even acknowledged in the credits, cf. White 1993, 117). Thus the movie in itself becomes a labyrinth for the public who, to be able to undertake Henson’s challenge, must be aware, as Michael Dunne justly observes (1992; cf. also White 1993, 117), of the hypotext.

And here again, Henson’s amazing talent of addressing both young and older viewers manifests itself, with the simultaneous use of classical and pop-cultural references. Next to the fairy-tale motifs, there are allusions to Arthurian myth (Sarah’s dog’s name is Merlin, her favourite teddy-bear is called Lancelot, etc.). Alongside the icons and the famous blockbuster scenes of the 1980s (the Muppet toys in Sarah’s bedroom; the Cleaning Machine similar to Indiana Jones’ rolling boulder, etc.), we can admire the children’s canon in the girl’s library (*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, etc.). Describing this network of references, it is precisely the metaphor of the labyrinth that White uses: “Those connections lead the viewers through the maze Henson has created for them as surely as Ariadne’s thread led Theseus through the

³¹ At one of the preliminary stages of the work on the scenario, the Canadian poet Dennis Lee wrote “a poetic novella” (Block and Erdmann [2016], 27).

Minotaur's labyrinth" (1993, 118). The moment of recognition of the hypotextual sources, often known to the public from their childhood, thus a period particularly permeated with emotions, additionally strengthens Henson's thread and creates a community of shared experiences between the viewers and the protagonists.

The motif of the labyrinth also gives the basis for the attempt at understanding the story's message. As Brian Froud notes, each maze is both "a physical place" and "a mental state" (in Block and Erdmann [2016], 20). Moreover, it represents at the same time "order and chaos, clarity and confusion, unity and multiplicity", to quote Sanna Qvick (2016, [n.p.]), who performs a highly interesting audio-visual close reading of the songs by David Bowie – the king of this ambiguous space. As such, the labyrinth offers various interpretative paths – from "a metaphor of knowledge" (encoded in its similarity to a brain), "a rite of passage" – for example to adulthood, "a symbol of sexual awakening", etc. (ibid.; cf. also Shiloh 2010, quoted by Qvick). And even though in the twentieth century "the fear of the Minotaur has been replaced with terror of getting lost for eternity" (Qvick 2016, [n.p.]; cf. also Shiloh 2010, 94), Henson knew it well that the labyrinth, to perform all its multifarious primordial functions and offer the humans a truly mythical thrill of seeing into the essence of things – needed to contain monsters.

Indeed, the creatures are crucial for Sarah's spiritual and physical journey. From Brian Henson's memories we know that his father and Brian Froud, the main designer for the movie, were great fans of monsters (Block and Erdmann [2016], 49–119; cf. also White 1993, 120). Froud wished to create such characters "that you would believe in" (Block and Erdmann [2016], 148). He succeeded to the point that the border between the real person and the creatures disappeared, as is typical of the Muppetontology: the monsters from *The Labyrinth* were introduced in Henson's correspondence as fully-fledged members of the cast, next to the young actress playing Sarah's part – Jennifer Connelly, herself mentioned with her real name (Block and Erdmann [2016], insert for 137).

Leaving aside the Goblins, who merit a separate study with less focus on classical mythology, I wish to mention three key creatures, representing three cycles that offer leaven for contemporary popular culture. These creatures help Sarah succeed – to find within herself love for her half brother, understand her own needs, and conquer the Labyrinth with its Goblin King. The often difficult friendship with the monsters teaches Sarah to fight prejudices and not to trust appearances, but always to search for truth – all of which also suits the concept of the labyrinth, in which nothing is as it seems.

The first creature, Hoggle, is a kind of dwarf and represents the folk tradition. According to Brian Henson, who gave him voice, he is the most complicated puppet the team ever designed, both in terms of its – or rather his – operational technique and character (Block and Erdmann [2016], 75). The viewers of the

movie receive a clear hint in regard to Hoggle's importance: he is indeed the first creature Sarah meets at the entrance to the Labyrinth.³² He is a servant of the Goblin King who sends him to spy on Sarah and he betrays her harshly, yet he undergoes a metamorphosis, along with the girl's – they both mature and discover the value of forgiveness, friendship, and sacrifice for our dear ones. Sarah's relationship with Hoggle has been portrayed as particularly significant "for people on the cusp of adulthood" by Brian, as quoted in an article on the Uproxx portal on the 30th anniversary of the movie:

And then she finds her friend, she becomes emotionally committed to him, he becomes emotionally committed to her, that gives her inner strength. Now she has inner strength and she has a higher level of confidence, and now she can do no wrong. Now every place she goes is right, and now she does come out in control. So I think it helps people too, just with life. They feel like, 'My life, I feel like I'm always out of control. I feel like everything's unfair.' And if you just give in to that, then your life's not going to go anywhere. Whereas if you instead find the people you love and you're committed to, you find an inner strength. (Brian Henson in Fiske [2016])

The next key creature is Sir Didymus, an "illogically brave knight", whose *emploi* is a gentle parody of Disney's Robin Hood in his foxy incarnation. He speaks in pseudo-medieval style (Block and Erdmann [2016], 127) and represents the Arthurian tradition. Sarah can learn through him the idealistic chivalrous code, including which aspect of it is too insane to be practiced safely. For maturing means also to learn how to handle one's ideals – to manage to rekindle them and control the fire, and not to be combusted in the process. Thus, Sir Didymus on his steed Ambrosius – modelled after Sarah's dog Merlin³³ – builds a connection between the real and the fantasy worlds. His friendship helps Sarah to re-evaluate her hierarchy of what is important. The effects of her transformation are symbolically presented in one of the final scenes, when she gives her brother her beloved teddy-bear Lancelot (the noblest and most tragic of Arthur's knights, a symbol of both: faith and betrayal). Thus her maturation process is accomplished and this also closes the framework of the whole story, as one of the first scenes of the movie and the catalyst of the action was Sarah's hysterical reaction to the discovery that Lancelot had been given to the boy without her permission and knowledge.

³² It is notable that Sarah mistakenly calls him "Hogwart" and – even though Rowling hints at a kind of flower as the source of her name for Britain's school of wizardry (Abel 1999) – some subconscious inspiration cannot be excluded.

³³ This should encourage further studies on the Human-Animal-Muppet interactions. It should also be noted that Ambrosius Aurelianus is one of the figures believed to have been himself, or to have been a model for, King Arthur.

Last but not least, the Goblin King's Labyrinth has its own Minotaur – Ludo, described as “a cross between a grizzly bear and a gorilla” (Block and Erdmann [2016], 95) or “an orange-haired hybrid of a buffalo and a gorilla, who walks like Charles Laughton's Hunchback of Notre Dame and talks like Grover on *Sesame Street*” (Richard Corliss in White 1993, 120). In his creation, next to the mythological heritage (his name, too, is “ancient”, from the Latin verb “I play”), an important source of inspiration was Maurice Sendak's book *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963), that overturned the stereotypical notion of a monster and was the favourite piece of reading of Henson's wife Jane.³⁴ In spite of his huge and terrifying demeanour, Ludo is kind and quiet, and he teaches Sarah not to judge others by appearance. There is a promo photography featuring both of them in the Beauty and the Beast style (Block and Erdmann [2016], 69), but there is no sexual tension between Sarah and Ludo. Rather they impersonate a brother and sister couple, a happy version of Ariadne and the Minotaur. He is Sarah's strong and gentle protector,³⁵ and she also helps him when he is in trouble, tormented by evil pixies. An interesting mythological motif is Ludo's ability to move stones, like Orpheus, yet not with the power of music or voice (he is capable of simple words only, including his name), but rather thanks to the creature's link to Earth.

The Monster with the capital M (indeed, he does his best to deserve this definition) with the truly Orphic powers is Sarah's antagonist – the Goblin King Jareth. That he is a malicious spirit is shown early in the movie by the fact that he must be invited by the girl to be able to enter her house, according to the folklore belief that evil creatures need invitation. Henson perfectly used the charisma of the already then legendary rock star David Bowie, whose creation of Jareth has become iconic. Bowie gave the Goblin King not only his body, but also his voice. Thus Jareth performed four – out of five included in the *Labyrinth*'s soundtrack³⁶ – songs. If you think that the remaining one was Sarah's, you could not be more wrong.

Qvick (2016) notices a crucial feature of the movie: we hear only male voices singing here. The only composition performed not by the Goblin King is the song *Chilly Down* by the wicked creatures Fireys that form the Fire Gang (“the

³⁴ Sendak also authored a book about a girl chasing after the Goblins who stole her sister away, *Outside Over There* (1981), with clear inspirations also by George MacDonald's exquisite classic *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872). On Sendak in the context of *The Labyrinth* see McGillivray (2012, 17).

³⁵ It was rather Hoggle who was slightly infatuated with Sarah.

³⁶ The soundtrack was prepared by Trevor Jones who closely collaborated with David Bowie and made a unique fusion of digital and analogue elements (Block and Erdmann [2016], 167).

brothers come ‘round’, as they sing).³⁷ In their ardent show (even in the Fireys’ name fire is present) they try to draw Sarah to a disturbing night party (“I get out of my dirty bed”, “Ain’t got no clothes to worry about”) and they attempt to rip off her head – a common sort of entertainment for them as Fireys’ members are interchangeable. The girl feels oppressed and experiences a kind of harassment in a deeper sense than it appears at first sight. In the story Sarah is at the age of her awakening womanhood. Her stepmother expects her to start dating – in her pin shot she is even called a “Venus in blue jeans” (Block and Erdmann [2016], 67). Yet she has no romantic relationship in the “real” world, not even a single colleague at school. Probably traumatized by the breakdown of her parents’ marriage, she suppresses – also in the “fantasy” realm – her novel needs that she is not aware of and experiences them strongly at the same time, especially when her intimate boundaries are violated. In the distressing meeting with the Fire Gang Sarah’s loneliness is emphasized, and, as Shiloh Carroll observes, also her virginity is alluded to, in a way that is “very subtle, only truly recognizable to those who know the term *maidenhead*” (2009, 110), when the Fire Gang wishes to decapitate her.

While Sarah’s escape from the Fireys proves relatively easy, her intercourse with the Goblin King is as hard as unavoidable. In fact, she has to find him in the very centre of the Labyrinth and confront him. Jareth as the Demon Lover is a perfect response to her subconscious dreams and he owes much in this respect to Bowie’s personality who, as a rock star, is “never quite real”, becoming “an amalgam of the inner fantasies of this girl” (Block and Erdmann [2016], 57). It is significant that we can see him for the first time in his animal form, in nature (a park), as an owl, when Sarah stages the moment of their confrontation as she imagines it, while reading the book *Labyrinth*. Next we can notice Jareth in his human shape (if we are observant enough) in Sarah’s most private space – her bedroom, on a picture, where he accompanies a woman who is probably Sarah’s mother. The woman is an actress and we are supposed to assume that she either died or rather left her husband and her daughter, thereby depriving her of a female pattern she would accept (Sarah’s stepmother is not an option for her). In their third encounter, Jareth appears in front of Sarah, after she invites him, in his full majesty of the Goblin King, surrounded by disquieting and exciting music. In the course of action he will gift Sarah with his songs.

According to Qvick the fact that Jareth is the only singing human character in the film “elevates him and his voice to mythical proportions” (2016, [n.p.]). Interestingly enough, a similar association – with a creature from mythology – is

³⁷ Also this song is written and registered as a demo entitled “Wild Things” (!) by Bowie who even imitated the cries of Toby in other sequences, as the toddler (Froud’s son) was not at all prone to crying. In the context of childhood experience and the adult choices, it can be added that Toby Froud grew up to become a sculptor and puppeteer, and he wrote a foreword for the official companion to *The Labyrinth* ([2016], 11).

preserved in Brian Froud's memory, from the moment when he saw Bowie on the set for the first time. He felt as if he "had momentarily been transported to an ancient mythological space, where fauns and satyrs were tangible". Bowie "was almost a mythical presence in himself":

[...] he leaped up onto the dressing table, crouched down, and played some notes. Behind him, I remember, he was framed by the light bulbs that go around the mirror. The dressing room was a prosaic place, but suddenly there was magic in the room! It was an astonishing transformation. Before me hunkered an evocation of Pan! My heart leaped and my instinct was to step back. (Froud in Block and Erdmann [2016], 54)

Fauns, satyrs, and Pan are closely linked to the music in classical mythology through one of the youngest gods of the Greek pantheon, Dionysus, who gave the gift of theatre and the new musical scales to the people, in some connection to Orpheus' myth, too. Yet Bowie's creation reaches also deeper, into primordial times, when the song remained within the domain of a group of mysterious female creatures. Qvick emphasizes the "birdy" look of Jareth – not limited to his owl incarnation, but also developed by his costume as well, with the typical for the 1980s "wide padded shoulders, which make his legs appear scrawny like a bird's" (2016, [n.p.]). In his Jareth-creation, defined as "queering humanity" (ibid.; see also Peraino 2006, 195–252; Merrick 2008) and operating on the tension between strongly masculine and typically feminine traits, Bowie becomes a male Siren. All his songs evince themselves as tools of seduction. As Qvick observes, "it becomes evident that with each song, Sarah is lured in closer to Jareth" (2016, [n.p.]), who so tries to distract her from the quest after her baby brother and, even more importantly, after her identity.

The culminating point of this process and the pinnacle of the movie is the stunning scene in the Ballroom – the only one in which only humans take part. Tricked by Hoggle into eating a forbidden fruit, like Snow White, or Eve,³⁸ or Persephone lured by the Dark Lord, Sarah is transported to an Underground party which seems romantic, until we remind ourselves that the Goblin King is centuries old (Bowie was thirty-nine at the time) and Sarah is a teenager (Connelly was fourteen).³⁹ As Marc Spitz observes, their encounter is highly disturbing, it contains "an intimidating amount of sexual tension" (quoted by Qvick 2016, [n.p.]; cf. also Spitz 2009, 336; and Reiland 2015). Moreover, Sarah is in "a drugged state" then, still feeling the effects of the poisoned peach (Qvick 2016, [n.p.]). This tension is further augmented by Jareth's song, *As the World*

³⁸ Cf. also Qvick 2016. It can be added that one of the first scenes Sarah witnesses in the Ballroom is that of a strange snake emerging from a box.

³⁹ As the movie's devoted fans deciphered by reading lips, an elf-goblin-woman tells Jareth, while he is observing Sarah shortly before inviting her to dance: "She is too young".

Falls Down – one of the most beautiful ballads in rock music. The lyrics hit Sarah profoundly, with Jareth's praise for her beauty and his declaration of falling in love and being always for her, even "as the world falls down". But this very song has – to quote Qvick (2016 [n.p.]) – "a Siren-like quality".

For centuries people have been trying to discover the essence of these creatures' magic – how they managed to enchant such a powerful mind as Odysseus', for instance. The Goblin King seems to know the answer. He promises Sarah what she, partly unaware, dreams of in the deepest depth of her heart. Seems enough, or maybe not?

While Odysseus, unable to resist temptation, had to be tied by his men to save himself from the Sirens, Sarah is protected by her innocence – alluded to by her white gown in the Ballroom scene. The gown, in strong contrast with the girl's earlier "mundane" outfit (jeans and a shirt – but still white – the colour symbolism is kept) resembles a wedding dress and is the dream of each "little princess". However, at the same time, it limits her movements and overwhelms her with its baroque heaviness.⁴⁰ The same Baroque-ness dominates also the Ballroom's decorations: columns, mirrors, chandeliers, and the guests' Venetian masks of strange animals and creatures. All this evokes the poetics of carnival when the natural order and rules are suspended.

Sarah feels attracted to this adult world, yet when the clock strikes twelve (out of thirteen hours at her disposal), she runs away, like Cinderella, but for a different reason. She makes a mature choice, as Brian Henson notes (in Block and Erdmann [2016], 58), for she learns that her fantasy is dangerous and she is not ready for the kind of love that the Goblin King wishes to offer to her (cf. also Qvick 2016). Unlike Odysseus, Sarah can be free and succeed through her own will, because she overcomes her egocentric desires and discovers in herself the altruistic emotions that make her ready to sacrifice her wishes for the safety of her half brother. Thus she conquers her first rite of passage. She takes the first object at hand – a chair – and she crashes the Ballroom's mirror-like walls, and the world literary falls down.

From the Ballroom Sarah is transported to a junkyard, for only now is she strong enough to deal with the one aspect of her childhood that still restrains her – the attachment to her toys, which recalls the rite of the Greek girls who sacrificed their dolls to the goddess Artemis at the threshold of their adulthood. At the junkyard Sarah meets the Junk Lady Muppet who symbolizes greed for material possessions and may be a mirror reflection of Sarah herself in the future, if she does not win the battle of her soul and remains focused on things, instead of on sentient beings. David R. Burns and Deborah Burns who define the movie as a *Bildungsroman* (2012, 131) interpret this scene in terms of Henson's manifestation of "anti-consumerism" (cf. also Latham 2002, 111–122):

⁴⁰ Cf. also the remarks by *The Labyrinth* costume designer Ellis Flyte in Block and Erdmann ([2016], 145).

Using film as a site of resistance, Henson encourages viewers to reflect on their consumerist lifestyles, resist mass media and contemporary culture's messages of overconsumption, reduce their consumption of consumer goods, and embrace the fulfillment of human relationships. (Burns and Burns 2012, 141)

This observation is very important and it relates to the crucial message of what really matters, recurring in all the productions from Henson's workshop (even Miss Piggy in her role of Kermit-Midas' wife recognized it). However, Sarah's attachment to her toys has yet another meaning. She treats them as anchors and searches within them for the sense of safety she needs so much. It is significant that from the junkyard she is moved to her bedroom – her childhood haven. But this particular bedroom setting is only one of the illusions created by the Goblin King to make her fail her quest. As soon as she realizes the emptiness of a life deprived of emotions towards other beings, the elaborate false bedroom falls down – again, the thread from Jareth's song.

Sarah is saved by Sir Didymus and Ludo – her true friends. Joined by the “converted” Hoggle, they help her conquer the Labyrinth. The culmination of her transformation process is her final duel with the Goblin King. In this context the motif of the Sirens returns. Sarah's last stage of her quest takes place in the “essence” of the Labyrinth – an illusory maze from Escher's lithograph *Relativity* (1953, cf. Figs. 5 and 6).



Fig. 5: M. C. Escher, *Relativity* as a poster in Sarah's room, screenshot by K. M. from the 2004 DVD *Labyrinth* edition.



Fig. 6: David Bowie as the Goblin King, fan-made (PattiSmith0) screenshot via YouTube.

She can see her brother, but is unable to reach him. Instead she struggles with her entrapment in a space fully controlled by the Siren-like Jareth, who defies the laws of logic and physics. He appears and disappears at will, thus confounding the girl still more. Even at the moments she cannot see him, she hears his seductive voice – he performs the second ballad in the movie – the song *Within You* that accentuates “the feeling of getting and being lost” (Qvick 2016, [n.p.]), loneliness, and the desperate need of love. But this kind of love, again, is only a

mirage. Sarah is suddenly aware she has arrived at a dead end – paradoxically depicted not as a wall, but a bottomless abyss. She takes a step further, nonetheless. She jumps, giving up much more than her dreams as she did in the Ballroom scene – she proves herself ready to give up her life. In this very moment the construction literary falls down – not only one room, but the whole fantasy realm of the Goblin King, as foreseen by him in his previous song. For those who enjoy Latin literature, Sarah will evoke the associations with the protagonist of Horace’s famous *carmen* 3.3.7–8: “si fractus illabatur orbis / impavidum ferient ruinae” (“if the world falls down, the ruins will strike him fearless”).

Indeed, Sarah faces the Goblin King fearless, even when he exposes her weaknesses and makes her aware of her choices that led them both to the confrontation:

Everything that you wanted I have done. You asked that the child be taken, I took him. You cowered before me, I was frightening. I have reordered time. I have turned the world upside down, and I have done it all for *you!* I am exhausted from living up to your expectations of me. Isn’t that generous? (01:31:13)

Jareth voices also his offer that was expressed only subconsciously during their dance: “I ask for so little. Just let me rule you. And you can have everything that you want. [...] Just fear me. Love me. Do as I say, and I will be your slave”. But Sarah has known herself, *noscit se ipsam*, and she is able to distinguish the true love and friendship from their illusion: “My will is as strong as yours. You have no power over me” (01:32:10–33:50), she says and she wins.

Paradoxically thus, it is the realm of fantasy that prepares Sarah for a mature, “real” life. Back in her bedroom the creatures from the Labyrinth revive for a moment, first to be seen in the mirror, and promise to be at her side: “[...] should you need us, for any reason at all” (01:35:15). Dave Goelz calls it “permission to take childhood forward into life” (in Block and Erdmann [2016], 187). According to Jim Henson, however, it was not only permission – it was the necessity if you wish to attain your own happy end. As his daughter Cheryl recalls, he had a rare ability to function “fully as an adult” and carry “his childhood with him all the time”:

[...] even though you’re no longer a kid, there are things from your childhood that you *don’t* have to put away forever. There’s that Bible line about ‘When I grew up, I put away childish things.’ Well, in my father’s world, your childish things are still there for you. Sarah can maintain her relationship with the characters that she created. They’ll be alive for her when she needs them. She can still tap into the strength that they give her. (Cheryl Henson in Block and Erdmann [2016], 187)

Sarah accepts her Muppet-friends' offer immediately: "I don't know why, but every now and again in my life... for no reason at all... I need you" (01:35:24). And then a wild party starts and we know that into the future the inhabitants of the realm of her imagination will remain to guard her, and will be nearby whenever she may miss them and require their support, even Jareth – under the shape of an owl, the animal that combines the sinister of the fairy tale with the wisdom of the myth.

Unus si tibi fidit homo, or Epilogue

Henson died on May 16, 1990, at the age of 53. His death was unexpected. Absorbed by his work, as always he ignored a simple cold. He died from toxic shock syndrome. The news was devastating to the masses of his fans and collaborators, captivated by his exceptional talent for gathering around him people who shared his vision and "understood how, through their art, to put that vision into service", as Brian Froud recalls (in Block and Erdmann [2016], 183). He was celebrated by a series of Memorial Services. Their participants needed to respect the conditions written down by Henson four years earlier, for he had been thinking about death, like many people who make others laugh. The conditions were: no black clothes and no gloomy ceremonies. Henson's friends and fans found a way to thank him. In a choir led by the puppeteers and their Muppets, they performed his favourite songs. One of the dearest to his heart comes from *Snoopy the Musical* (1975, after Larry Grossman and Hal Hackady) and it has been sung in at least thirteen different Muppet shows so far (1977–2013; cf. Muppet Wiki [n.d.], s.v. "Just One Person"). It starts with the words: "If Just One Person Believes in You", and they make up the title.

It is possible to watch the clip on the Internet (e.g., Laser Time 2015). The poor quality of the video only emphasizes its incredibly strong emotional weight, perceptible after all these years. Watching the clip, you can also mark how the borders between the Muppets and the humans blur. It seems as if they all are real and sing in unison. And indeed they are and they do. A similar sensation has been reported in the research on how children react to the Muppets in the situations when they see the actual puppeteers. In fact, the children keep talking to the Muppets as if they were real creatures.⁴¹ But we have already seen numerous times through this chapter that adults also treat them as fully-fledged beings, our kin in this world. This approach is usually explained with "a simple matter of nostalgia" of the people who "grew up with the characters as kids. It's a testament to Henson's work developing characters so iconic" (Nakamura 2015). Indeed, it is, but there is more to that, as I believe.

⁴¹ Zoe Jaques, in her monograph *Children's Literature and Posthuman*, notices that, even as a toy, the marionette is disturbing as it functions in the image of human being (2015, 209–234). Cf. also Marciniak (2019b).

At such a moment Myth comes into being – with a capital M. This rare experience takes place only if the Master of the Puppets has used his power with true passion, not to manipulate the feelings of the public, but to help them discover and express their deepest emotions. Such a moment is to be witnessed precisely in the clip with Henson’s favourite song: you can see men and women, black and white, young and old, and the Muppets – all in one chorus like from the Greek tragedy that evokes our pity and fear, and thus makes us stronger. This is the ancient power that allows us to see what really matters. As Jim Henson put it in his farewell letter to his children: “Please watch out for each other and love and forgive everybody. It’s a good life, enjoy it”.

The song *If Just One Person Believes in You* speaks of those who have supported us, about whom we think in our dark hours:

If just one person believes in you,
 Deep enough, and strong enough, believes in you...
 Hard enough, and long enough
 Before you know it, someone else will think:
 “If he can do it, I can do it.”

And when more and more such people join, a miracle may happen:

And maybe even you,
 Can believe in you... Too!

I believe that we all have such persons in our lives and I am pleased to share that the first two verses of the song, in English, Polish, and Latin (these in Wilfried Stroh’s translation: “Unus si tibi fidit homo, neque deficit umquam...”) form three inscriptions in the main Conference Hall of my Faculty of “Artes Liberales” (cf. Fig. 7), while the whole song has become our semi-official anthem.



Fig. 7: Conference Hall of the Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw, White Villa, phot. Robert Przybysz.

With this chapter I pay homage to Jim Henson and his great team for brightening up my childhood, and to all who have ever showed me their faith, also the faith in the power of mythical creatures.

Indeed, they are closer than we think. They hide in books, in the childhood-tales told by our parents and grandparents, in movies and computer games, they dwell in museums, ruins, woods and city parks, they lurk in our souls and nest in our hearts. Always ready, for any reason at all, should only we need their support. If they believe in us, as the Muppets undoubtedly prove, it is only fair that we believe in them and in their myths. And when the world falls down for the next time, this faith, as it always has, will save us.

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Matylda Tracewska, *Our Mythical Childhood* (2013), artwork symbolizing the Programme *Our Mythical Childhood*.

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Index prepared by Monika Wenzel, basing on the choice of terms by Hanna Paulouskaya with a contribution from Olga Strycharczyk.

CHASING MYTHICAL BEASTS

Selected Illustrations in Colour



Maja Abgarowicz, *Cerberus* (2012), artwork symbolizing the project *Chasing Mythical Beasts*.
Illustration created at the Workshop of Prof. Zygmunt Januszewski,
Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw.



DEBORAH H. ROBERTS with SHEILA MURNAGHAN
Picturing Duality: The Minotaur as Beast and Human
in Illustrated Myth Collections for Children



Fig. 2: Elenore Plaisted Abbott and Helen Alden Knipe, *Theseus and the Minotaur*, illustration from Nathaniel Hawthorne, *A Wonder Book and Tanglewood Tales*, Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs, 1911, facing 246.



Fig. 3: Pep Montserrat, *Theseus and the Minotaur*, illustration from Eric Kimmel, *The McElderry Book of Greek Myths*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008, 82, © 2008 Pep Montserrat. Reprinted with the permission of Margaret K. McElderry, an imprint of Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division. All rights reserved.



PRZEMYSŁAW KORDOS

Familiar Monsters: Modern Greek Children Face
the *Minotavros*, *Idra*, and *Kerveros*

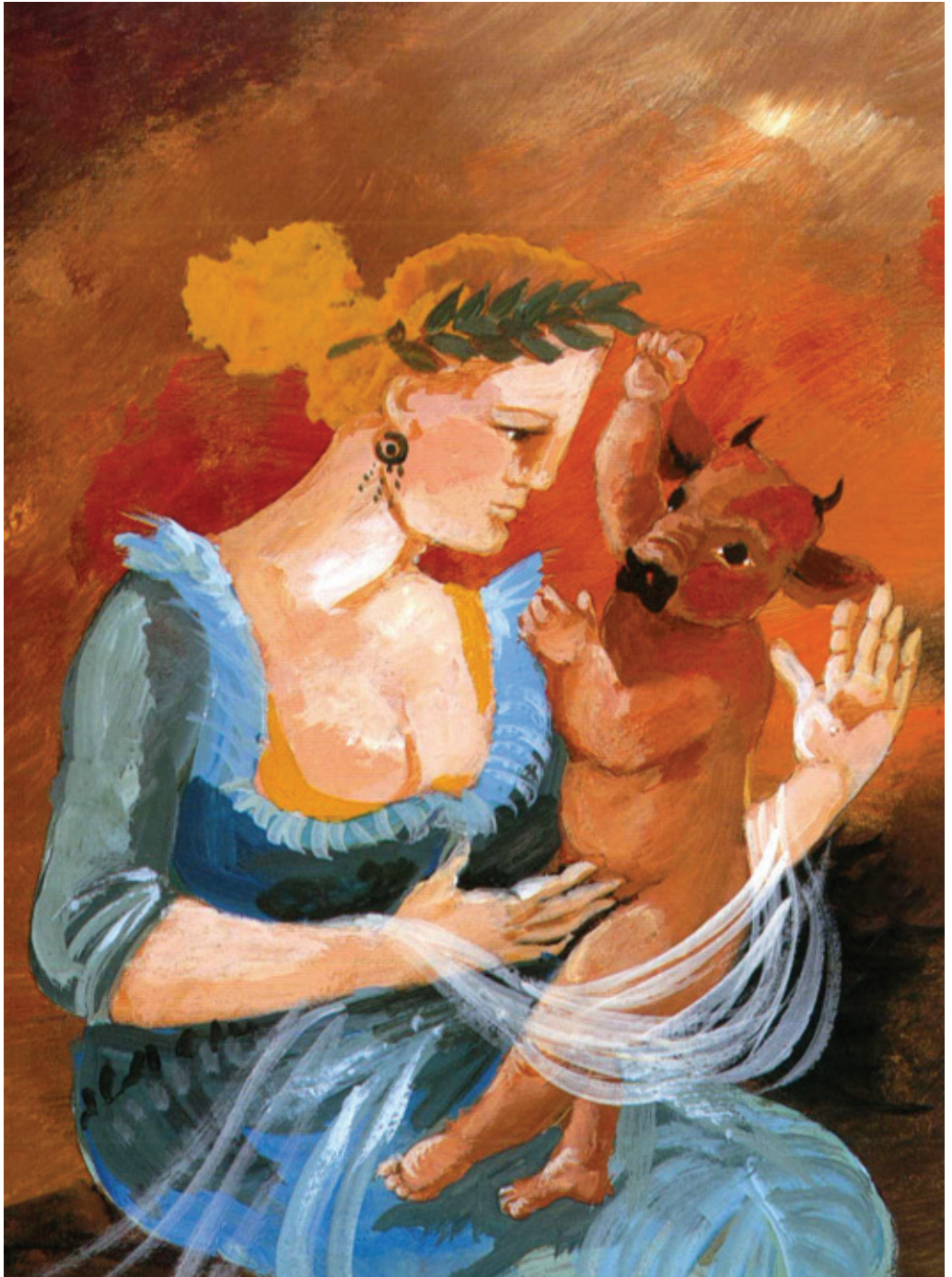


Fig. 1: Sofia Zarabouka, Pasiphaë and the young Minotaur, from Sofia Zarabouka, *Mythologia*. Vol. 10, Athens: Kedros, 2011, 9.



Fig. 2: Pasiphaë nursing the Minotaur, red-figured kylix, ca. 340–320 BC, Louvre Museum, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, No. inv. 1066, phot. Bibi Saint-Pol, Wikimedia Commons.



Fig. 3: Theseus and Minotaur, from Spiros Kontis, *Theseas*, Athens: Patakis, 2011, 23.



Fig. 4: Natalia Kapatsoulia, Theseus, the Minotaur and the Labyrinth, from Filippos Mantilaras, *O Theseas*, Athens: Papadopoulos, 2011, 6–7.



Fig. 6: Nestoras Xouris, A cloud in the shape of the Minotaur, from Katerina Mouriki and Ioanna Kyritsi-Tzioti, *Theseas*, Athens: Diaplasi, 2016, 29.

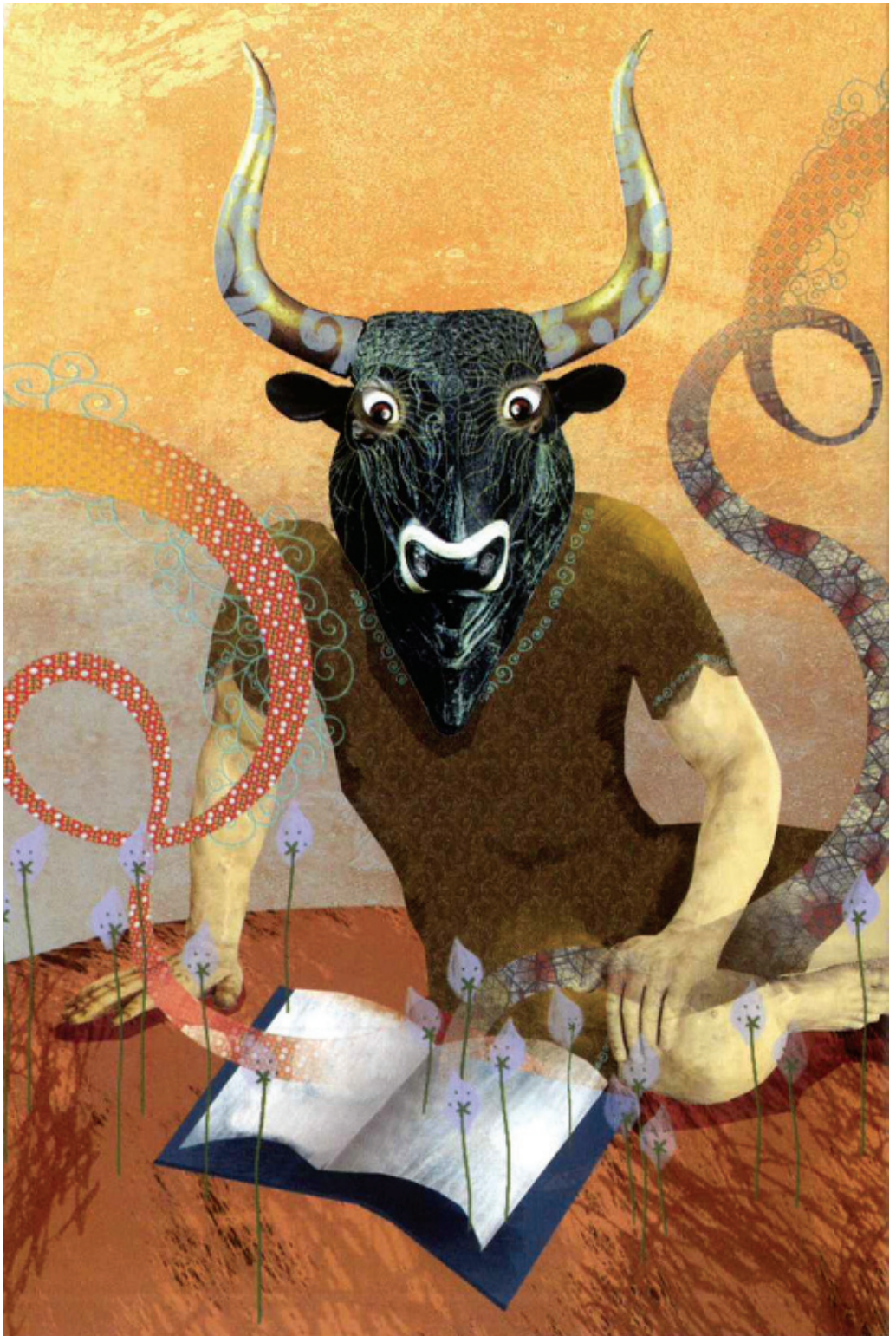
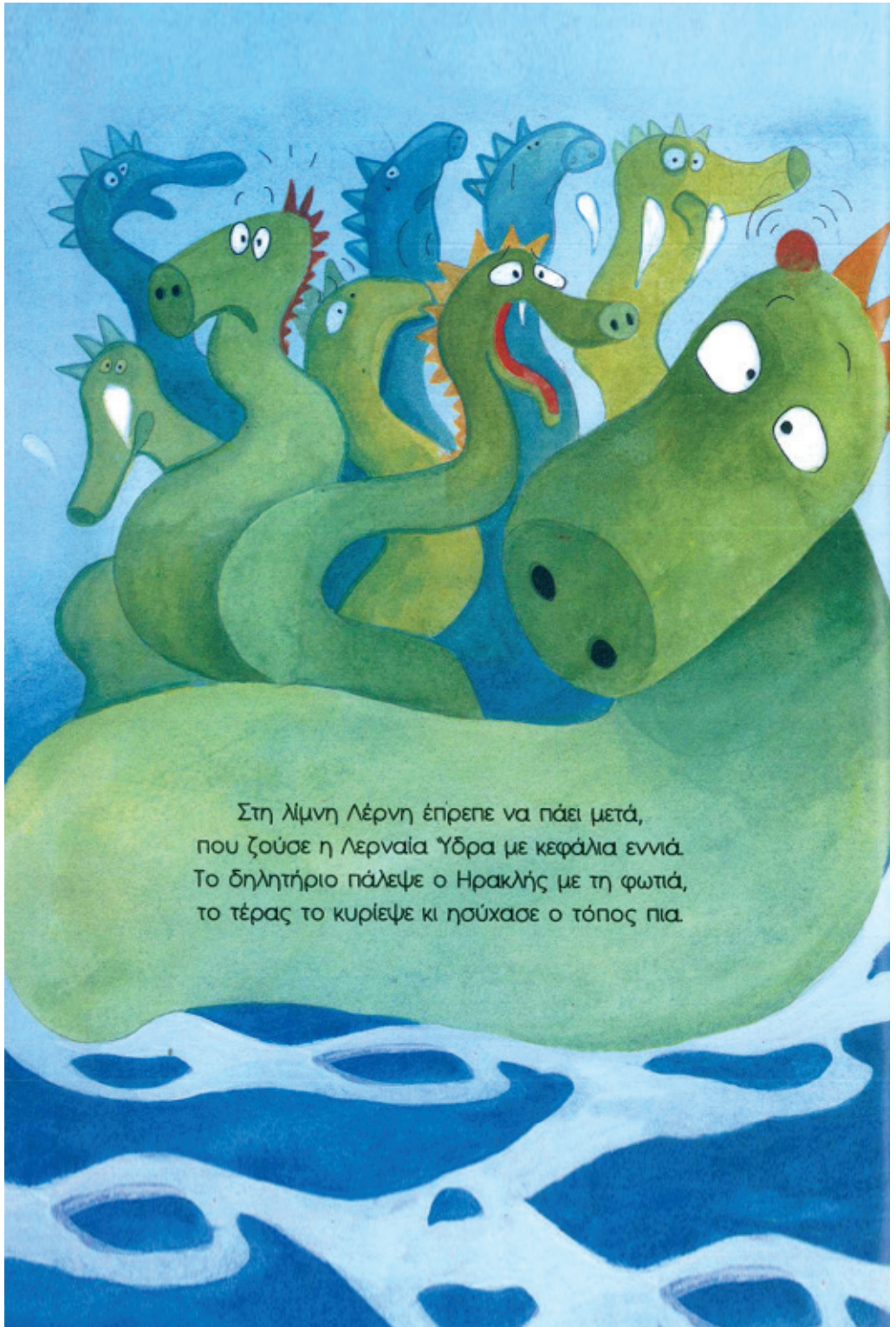


Fig. 5: Iris Samartzi, *The Minotaur in a mask*, from Kostas Poulos, *Labyrinthos kai Minotavros*, Athens: Metaichmio, 2015, cover.



Στη λίμνη Λέρνη έπρεπε να πάει μετά,
που ζούσε η Λερναία Υδρα με κεφάλια εννιά.
Το δηλητήριο πάλεψε ο Ηρακλής με τη φωτιά,
το τέρας το κυρίεψε κι ησύχασε ο τόπος πια.

Fig. 7: Natalia Kapatsoulia, Hydra's baffled heads, from Filippos Mantilaras, *O Iraklis*, Athens: Papadopoulos, 2008, 8.



Fig. 8: Alekos Papadatos and Annie di Donna, The end of the Hydra, from Aspasia Protogerou, *Theoi, iroes kai terata*, Athens: Polaris, 2016, 112.



Fig. 9: Vasilis Zisis, Hercules and Hydra, from Eleni Papadaki, *O Iraklis*, Athens: Pechlivanidis, [n.d.], 15.



Fig. 10: Alexia Othonaiou, Cerberus, from Alexia Othonaiou, *Arkhaiia mythika terata*, Athens: Tetragono, 2010, 12–13.



SUSAN DEACY

“From the shadows”: Goddess, Monster, and Girl Power in Richard Woff’s *Bright-Eyed Athena in the Stories of Ancient Greece*

Fig. 1: Photograph of Richard Woff, *Bright-Eyed Athena in the Stories of Ancient Greece*, London: British Museum Press, 1999, 7, with permission of the Author. The image is an Attic white-ground oenochoe by the Brygos Painter, 490–470 BC, London, British Museum D13. Original image © Trustees of the British Museum.



Fig. 2: Attributed to near the Theseus Painter, *Perseus Chasing Gorgons*, Attic black-figure kyathos, 510–500 BC, J. Paul Getty Museum 86.AE.146. Digital image courtesy of the Getty’s Open Content Program.



Fig. 3: An owl between two olive branches, from the Group of the Floral Nolan, Attic red-figure kalpis, 480–470 BC. J. Paul Getty Museum 86.AE.229. Digital image courtesy of the Getty’s Open Content Program.

EDITH HALL

Cheiron as Youth Author: Ancient Example, Modern Responses



Fig. 5: Peleus bringing the infant Achilles to Cheiron, white-ground oinochoe, late black-figure style, 520–500 BCE, British Museum 1867,0508.1009, reproduced from Winifred Margaret Lambart Hutchinson, *Golden Porch: A Book of Greek Fairy Tales*, New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1914, 140, Wikimedia Commons.



ELENA ERMOLAEVA

Centaurs in Russian Fairy Tales: From the Half-Dog Pulicane to the Centaur Polkan



Fig. 1: The Kitovras and a stamp of the scribe Euphrosyn, Monk of the Kirillo-Belozersky Monastery (fifteenth century). MS. The National Library of Russia, a collection of the Kirillo-Belozersky Monastery, 11 / 1088, 127.



Fig. 2: The Polkan, a Kargopol toy, phot. Elena Ermolaeva.

JERZY AXER and JAN KIENIEWICZ
The *Wobo's* Itinerary: There and Back Again

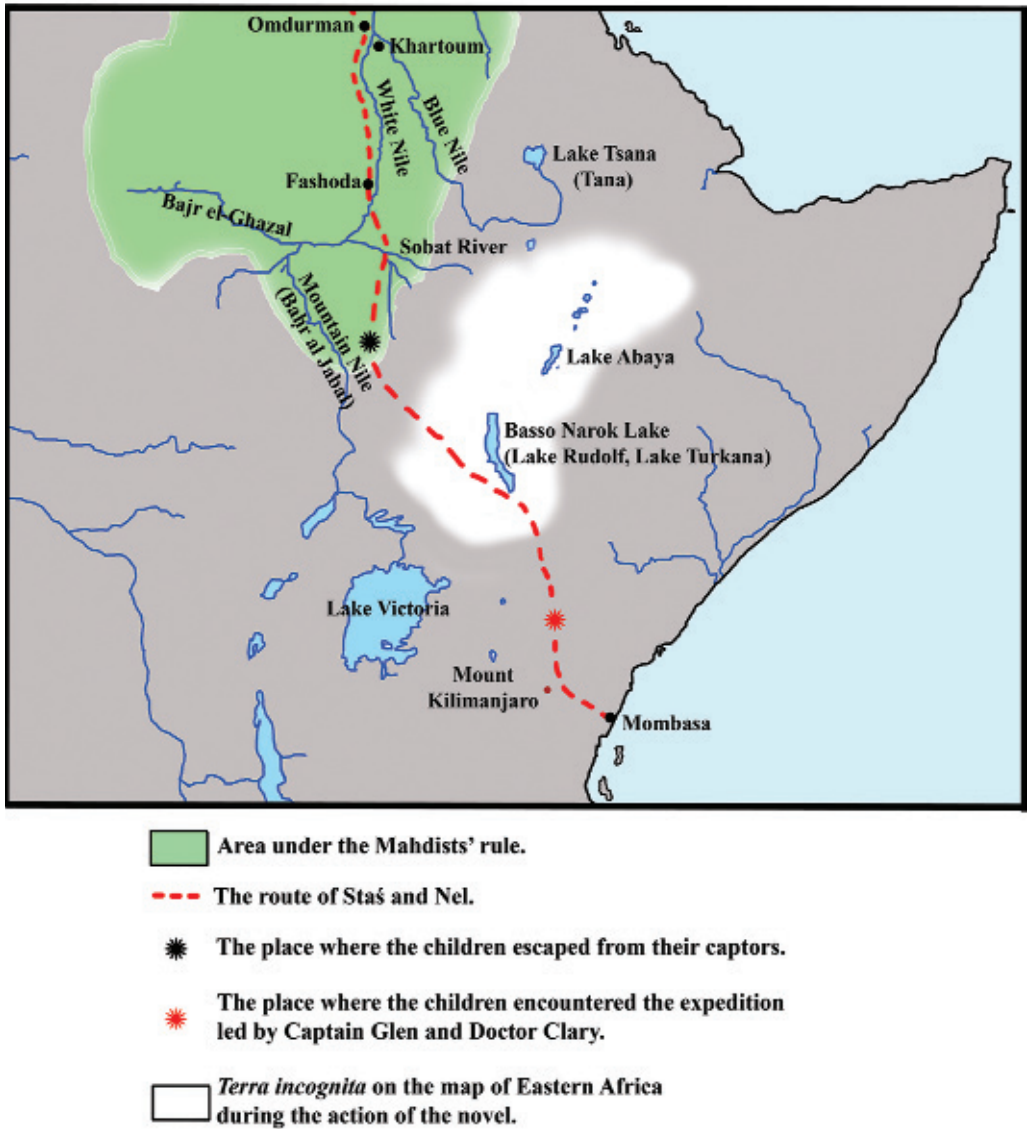


Fig. 1: Africa in the novel *In Desert and Wilderness* by Henryk Sienkiewicz, map by Robert Przybyasz.

KATARZYNA MARCINIAK

Chasing Mythical Muppets: Classical Antiquity according to Jim Henson



Fig. 7: Conference Hall of the Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw, White Villa, phot. Robert Przybysz.

OUR MYTHICAL CHILDHOOD



Matylda Tracewska, *Our Mythical Childhood* (2013), artwork symbolizing the Programme *Our Mythical Childhood*.

MARCINIAK (Ed.)
Chasing Mythical Beasts

Classical Antiquity is strongly present in youth culture globally. It accompanies children during their initiation into adulthood and thereby deepens their knowledge of the cultural code based on the Greek and Roman heritage. It enables intergenerational communication, with the reception of the Classics being able to serve as a marker of transformations underway in societies the world over. The team of contributors from Europe, North America, Africa, Australia, and New Zealand focuses on the reception of mythical creatures as the key to these transformations, including the changes in human mentality. The volume gathers the results of a stage of the programme *Our Mythical Childhood*, supported by an Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Alumni Award for Innovative Networking Initiatives and an ERC Consolidator Grant. Thanks to the multidisciplinary character of its research (Classics, Modern Philologies, Animal Studies) and to the universal importance of the theme of childhood, the volume offers stimulating reading for scholars, students, and educators, as well as for a wider audience.

ISBN 978-3-8253-6995-8

