



A Kaleidoscope of Mythical Beasts, Beyond Time and Space: Keys to Understanding Oneself and Culture

Marciniak, K. (Ed.). (2020). *Chasing mythical beasts: The reception of ancient monsters in children's and young adults' culture*. Universitätsverlag Winter.

Abstract:

The paper aspires to provide a critical presentation of the content of the *Chasing Mythical Beasts: The Reception of Ancient Monsters in Children's and Young Adults' Culture* collective volume, edited by Katarzyna Marciniak (2020), and an interpretative framing for the recurrent emergence of mythical beasts in literature and other media for children and young people. Famous mythical monsters – the Minotaur, Medusa, Pegasus, centaurs, and sirens – reappear either in their original form or in other versions in a wide range of stories, becoming a vehicle for critical reflections over a variety of subjects, like the encounter with the Other, the coming of age, the female power, totalitarianism, ethical dilemmas, or human relationships, to mention some of them. Monsters' diffusion in almost all cultural fields highlights their universality, recognisability, popularity, and flexibility to adjust to requirements and priorities of all times and spaces. Their inexhaustible potential remains to be further explored.

Key words:

children's and young adult culture, classical reception studies, Graeco-Roman mythology, interdisciplinarity, intercultural intersections, Katarzyna Marciniak, mythical beasts

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Kalejdoskop mitycznych bestii ponad czasem i przestrzenią. Klucze do zrozumienia siebie i kultury

Marciniak, K. (red.). (2020). *Chasing mythical beasts: The reception of ancient monsters in children's and young adults' culture*. Universitätsverlag Winter.

Abstrakt:

Celem artykułu jest krytyczna prezentacja zawartości tomu zbiorowego *Chasing Mythical Beasts: The Reception of Ancient Monsters in Children's and Young Adults' Culture* pod redakcją Katarzyny Marciniak (2020) oraz zaproponowanie ram interpretacyjnych dla powracającego zjawiska pojawiania się mitycznych bestii w literaturze i innych mediach dla dzieci i młodzieży. Słynne mityczne potwory – Minotaur, Meduza, Pegaz, centaury, syreny – powracają w swej pierwotnej postaci lub w innych wersjach w wielu opowieściach, stając się nośnikami krytycznej refleksji na różne tematy, takie jak spotkanie z Innym, dojrzewanie, kobieca siła, totalitaryzm, dylematy etyczne czy relacje międzyludzkie, by wymienić tylko niektóre z nich. Upowszechnienie się potworów w niemal wszystkich dziedzinach kultury podkreśla ich uniwersalność, rozpoznawalność, popularność i elastyczność w dopasowywaniu się do wymagań i priorytetów wszystkich czasów i przestrzeni. Ich potencjał, niewyczerpany, pozostaje do dalszego zbadania.

Słowa kluczowe:

kultura dziecięca i młodzieżowa, studia nad recepcją antyku, mitologia grecko-rzymska, interdyscyplinarność, przecięcia międzykulturowe, Katarzyna Marciniak, mityczne bestie

C*hasing Mythical Beasts: The Reception of Ancient Monsters in Children's and Young Adults' Culture*, edited by Katarzyna Marciniak (2020a) and published by Universitätsverlag Winter, Heidelberg, is part of the series *Studien zur europäischen Kinder- und Jugendliteratur/Studies in European Children's and Young Adult Literature*. The volume summarises the results of the “Our Mythical Childhood” programme, carried out as part of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Award and ERC Consolidator Grant. Within the programme's scope were not only literary but also other artistic and media spheres which generate cultural products for young people.

The book provides an interdisciplinary approach in the context of the overarching concept of classical reception studies (Hardwick, 2003; Hardwick & Stray, 2011; Richardson, 2019) about mythical beasts. It brings together insights from children's and young adults' literature and culture, classics, history, ethnology, archaeology, arts, comparative mythology, monster theory, psychoanalysis, gender studies, new media studies, etc. Despite the fact that

the volume is rich in variety and content, in no way does it claim inclusiveness, since the subject matter has proved itself inexhaustible, self-powered, and productive.

Mythology, especially the Graeco-Roman one, to which Western civilisation has been uninterruptedly exposed, has come to imbue and colonise our inner self, being an organic and indispensable part of our collective memory. Those brought up with the Western worldview carry a certain though also vague knowledge of an unidentified origin about Greek and Roman mythology, not crystallised but rather adjustable, flexible, transformable, and multifaceted. Historical time and cultural circumstances recontextualise the mythological content and reshape it into new moulds (Moula & Malafantis, 2019), compatible with new sensitivities and questions. Therefore, mythological reception becomes a marker of societal transformations throughout the ages.

Graeco-Roman monsters inhabit an exceptional mythological territory, that of the Other, which is permeable and ontologically ambivalent since the Otherness's versions and ramifications in the mundane world create a symbiotic space with humanness. In this penetrable space with blurred boundaries, the "uncanny" or, in other words, the "strangely familiar" that appears in an unsettling context, long alienated through repressions, re-emerges (Freud, 1919/1955). At the encounter with the monsters, attraction coexists with repulsion, emitting an eerie feeling of distressing charm and agony. Monsters, although they remain culturally specific and remarkably consistent through time, manage to reach and express each epoch's core anxieties.

This extraordinary status of mythical monsters has lured many scholars in since a long time ago. From the founding studies of Charles Gould (1886) and D. S. Lamb (1900) to the present-day cryptozoology (Naish, 2016), mythical beasts and their descendants exercise a great influence on our imagination and fuel it. Various theoretical approaches: anthropological (Clasen, 2012), psychological (Bodart, 2012), postmodern, cultural materialistic (Moula, 2012), feminist (Cixous, 1975/1976; Moula, 2018), Marxist, postcolonial (Poole, 2011) and more have been applied to the body of mythical monsters, revealing their inexhaustible potential for interpretations and transformations. The range of the present-day scholarly interest transcends the borders of Western civilisation and comprises several, until recently, marginalised or silenced cultural traditions (Gilmore, 2012), either with their own monstrous heritage or with incarnations and variations of mythological beasts. In popular culture, classical monsters, either unchanged or evolved, are well represented in the mediasphere (Švelch, 2013; Iten, Steinemann, & Opwis, 2018) and are diffused in all kinds of narratives directed to all kinds of audiences (Ahmed, 2019; Christie,

2020; Landis, 2011). This fact reveals their cultural popularity, durability, and adaptability.

Katarzyna Marciniak (2020c), in her introduction, “What Is a (Classical) Monster? The Metamorphoses of the Be(a)st Friends of Childhood,” dedicates this publication to Alexander von Humboldt, the naturalist and explorer, for the 250th anniversary of his birth. She discusses some basic aspects of the monster theory and focuses on one of the most formidable and famous monsters ever, the Minotaur. She offers an overview of the volume’s content and closes with an allusive warning against the book’s reading, suggesting that an encounter with the mythological monsters might metamorphose us, the readers, irreversibly.

The volume is divided into five sections. In the first one, “In the Maze of Youth: Meeting the Minotaur,” the homonymous mythical beast is in the spotlight. In a chapter titled “A Kind of Minotaur?: Literal and Spiritual Monstrosity in the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne,” Sheila Murnaghan and Deborah H. Roberts (2020) comment on the collections *A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys* (1851) and *Tanglewood Tales* (1853), supposedly composed by the titular author’s invented narrator, Bright Eustace, a college student. This fictional manoeuvre is nothing but an intentional child-oriented move to mitigate mythic horror and purify the tales, so as to respond to young children’s sensitivity. Hawthorne’s overarching Christianised morality, combined with humorous and optimistic touches, is reflected upon the presentation of the Minotaur himself – shown more as a kind of ‘pet-monster,’ a creature worth of our sympathy, than a loathsome beast.

Roberts with Murnaghan (2020) follow with another chapter, “Picturing Duality: The Minotaur as Beast and Human in Illustrated Myth Collections for Children.” The authors examine the Minotaur’s visual depiction in British and American myth collections from the 1850s, and they come up with three major strategies of the composers: the Minotaur as a monster, as fully animal, and as human, each of them representing a different conception of the child as a reader. Although the Minotaur’s appearance has been established ever since the 8th century B.C., consisting of a bull head and a human body, illustrators have always reworked this piece of information freely, contributing with their visual interpretations to new reception of the creature’s stories.

Liz Gloyn (2020) continues with the chapter “Mazes Intricate: The Minotaur as a Catalyst of Male Identity Formation in British Young Adult Fiction.” The beast becomes a mould for modern incarnations which negotiate the identity of male young adults. The three case stories: *Shadow of the Minotaur* by Alan Gibbons (2000), *Corydon and the Island of Monsters* by Tobias Druitt (2005), and *Stoneheart* by Charlie Fletcher (2006), each through

different contexts, come to reinforce social conformity by equating the model masculinity to stereotyped male qualities. Correspondingly, the confrontation of the Minotaur becomes the young protagonists' rite of passage into maturity, self-knowledge, and socially acceptable behaviour.

Following, comes Markus Janka's and Michael Stierstorfer's (2020) chapter, "*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.*" The scholars offer a thorough overview of the mythical hybrids' functionalisation in contemporary fantasy fiction and media for children and young adults. They focus on the Minotaur's versions, looking for Greek and Roman hypotexts, and detect three main trends of the beast's instrumentalisation in postmodern works (*Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* – the 2005 book by Rick Riordan and the 2010 film by Chris Columbus; *The Hunger Games* – the 2008 novel by Suzanne Collins and the 2012 film by Gary Ross; *Die Irrfahrer* [The Wanderers] – the 2007 book by Herd Scherm): into a free robber, a werewolf, and a vegetarian helper, which can be summed up to the dichotomous schema: an evil antagonist or a good assistant.

Przemysław Kordos, with his chapter "Familiar Monsters: Modern Greek Children Face the *Minotavros*, *Idra*, and *Kerveros*," delves into the Greek editorial space and comments on 14 books, published in the last 15 years. These works depict the ancient monsters: the Minotaur, the Hydra, and Cerberus, all following the same typology (a snake multiplied by 7, an evil dog with three heads, and a muscular man with a bull head). The illustrations of the beasts can be classified either in the funny or in the domesticated variations that aim mainly to amuse Greek young audience rather than to scare it.

Elizabeth Hale (2020), in "Facing the Minotaur in the Australian Labyrinth: Politics and the Personal in *Requiem for a Beast*," discusses the famous hybrid, multimedia book *Requiem for a Beast: A Work for Image, Word and Music* by Matt Ottley (2007). Here, a kind of Minotaur (a Brahman bull) becomes the key factor for the young protagonist to reach a critical understanding of his ancestors' crimes against the aboriginal Australians and to heal the wounds of the past. His labyrinth, personal and national, transform him into the hybrid troublesome self he must face, overcome, and reconcile with, to gain his psychological freedom.

The heading of section 2 is "Eye to Eye with Medusa & Co.: Facing the Female Monsters" and it starts with Susan Deacy's (2020) essay, "From the shadows: Goddess, Monster, and Girl Power in Richard Woff's *Bright-Eyed Athena in the Stories of Ancient Greece*." The researcher initiates a dialogue between

British museum's artifacts and storytelling, which supports negotiation and inquiry, especially about the Otherness of women who overstep or trespass the borders of their gender roles. As appearances are deceiving, Athena is not thoroughly innocent, and Medusa is not the only one to blame for their conflicting relationship. Through the fluid and questionable personality attributed to Athena, young girls at the threshold period of their lives are encouraged to rely on their inner girl power.

Owen Hodkinson (2020), in the chapter "She's not deadly. She's beautiful?: Reclaiming Medusa for Millennial Tween and Teen Girls?," lends the mythological monsters to our century and talks about real-world problems, generated by stereotyped concepts of beauty and ugliness. He discusses the trend of feminist revisionist retellings of myths for children and young adults, with the aim to restore the reputation of classical female characters and in particular that of the Gorgon. These retellings recontextualise the story in contemporary settings and demolish the binary oppositions of gender norms, while the monstrosity is also used as an analogue to other kinds of Otherness and their consequences. Nevertheless, from the three retellings examined, only *Being Me(dusa)* by A. Lynn Powers (2014) dares to foreground the subject of sexual assault, acquitting Medusa from centuries-long sexist blaming.

Babette Puetz (2020), in her chapter, "What will happen to our honor now?: The Reception of Aeschylus' Erinyes in Philip Pullman's *The Amber Spyglass*," discusses the atrocious creatures of matriarchy, the Erinyes, and their recent reappearances. In the *Amber Spyglass* (2000), Harpies, strongly resembling Aeschylus's Erinyes, are mobilised to overturn their classical interpretation. The appalling is turned into something familiar through kindness, fairness, and persuasion. Harpies become a catalyst for Lyra's (the book protagonist's) rite of passage to maturation and to positive evolution. Thus, ancient didactic content and fear of punishment gave way to new values of responsibility and rationality. At the same time, Pullman propounds the act of storytelling as a way to reimagining the world.

Weronika Kostecka and Maciej Skowera (2020), in their essay, "Womanhood and/as Monstrosity: A Cultural and Individual Biography of the 'Beast' in Anna Czerwińska-Rydel's *Bałtycka syrena* [The Baltic Siren]," present the biography of a singer and musician from Gdansk, born in 1605, Constantia Zierenberg (and her depiction in the titular book by Anna Czerwińska-Rydel, 2014), whose restless spirit and unconventional character brought her into conflict with society and gave her the notoriety of a monster. Departing from the moralistic aspect of women's biographies, the story, weaved by an intertextual net, participates in the perpetual recreation of the sirens' myth. The non-typicality

of this exceptional woman added a mysterious aura of the Otherness to her, which led to her social stigmatisation.

Katarzyna Jerzak (2020), in “Remnants of Myth, Vestiges of Tragedy: Peter Pan in the Mermaids’ Lagoon,” treats the motif of the mermaids as a kernel to be implanted and expanded in new spin-offs, refreshing in this way also Peter Pan’s resonance and impact. By focalising on the chapter of *Peter and Wendy* (1911) set in the mermaids’ lagoon, we are presented with J. M. Barrie’s conception of childhood as a heterotopia made of imagination and nostalgia for our past selves. Peter Pan, a tragic and comic archetype simultaneously, is reflected in the hybrid and contradictory nature of the mermaid, who is both a threat of extinction and a safe way to freedom. In a rather circular kind of narrative, the mingling of mythical and fairy-tale elements provide us with a glimpse into our collective memory.

Section 3 is titled “Horned and Hoofed: Riding into the Adulthood,” and Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer (2020) opens the curtain with her chapter, “On the Trail of Pan: The Blending of References to Classical Antiquity and Romanticism in J. M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan*.” Starting her exploration from the Greek god Pan, she follows the traces of his evolution and transformations to illuminate retrospectively Peter Pan’s complex character by searching for his composing elements in the Greek mythology and beyond, in *Das fremde Kind* [The Strange Child] by E. T. A. Hoffmann (1817). Peter’s actions, provoking the awakening of sexuality as well as panic in the lost children, are manifestations of his similarity to Greek god Pan, while his gender neutrality and being an outcast bring him close to Hoffman’s romantic ideal of childhood. Caught in an eternal present, without empathy or memory, he arouses ambivalent feelings in the readers, to supposedly make them identify themselves with the lost children.

Edith Hall (2020) in her essay, “Cheiron as Youth Author: Ancient Example, Modern Responses,” immerses into the Cheiron archetype and finds it in the series by Riordan (*Percy Jackson*, 2005–2009) and J. K. Rowling (*Harry Potter*, 1997–2007). Based on the previous work of Lisa Maurice (2015), the author discusses the predominance of the virtuous figure of a centaur in the post-Renaissance period, with rare exceptions like the *Blue Centaur*, published in a collection by William Lane (1794). Taking as a starting point two ancient sources, *Cheironeia* and *Precepts of Cheiron*, she runs through various literary initiations of Cheiron’s personality, from the influential works of Charles Kingsley and C. S. Lewis to *Harry Potter* and *Percy Jackson*, which all contribute to Cheiron’s typification. The paper concludes by underlining the abundant unexploited potential of Cheiron as a figure embedded in children’s stories.

Elena Ermolaeva (2020) follows with her chapter, “Centaur in Russian Fairy Tales: From the Half-Dog Pulicane to the Centaur Polkan.” The paper discusses the reception of centaurs in Russian medieval stories. It focuses on the story of King Salomon and the beast Kitovras, whose origin might have been the demon Asmodeus, and on the story of Prince Bova and the Polkan, both popular between the 16th and 19th centuries. These centaur-like beasts used to paradoxically combine savagery and wisdom in equal parts. In addition, the latter experienced a revival in the 20th century, proving the mythical motif’s durability.

Karoline Thaidigsmann’s (2020) essay is titled “(Non-)Flying Horses in the Polish People’s Republic: The Crisis of the Mythical Beast in Ambivalent Polish Children’s Literature.” It discusses three ambivalent children’s books, using various techniques of Aesopian language and published during the communist period in Poland. Their common ground is the symbol of an exceptional horse, flying or not, an incarnation of Pegasus that offers them a vehicle for criticism of totalitarianism. At the same time, these vanishing peculiar creatures represent people’s shrinking potential to free themselves if left to conformity and to fight against oppression due to their fears.

Simon J. G. Burton (2020), in “A Narnian ‘Allegory of Love’: The Pegasus in C. S. Lewis’s *Chronicles of Narnia*,” traces the emergence of flying and talking horses and unicorns in Narnia as symbols of the Christian tradition. The author detects Christian connotations and biblical imagery in Lewis’s novel cycle (1950–1956), with Aslan, the lion, as an allegory of God. Flying horses, Strawberry or Fledge, function as autonomous but also complementary parts of the Trinitarian deity of Narnia’s storyworld, whose mission is to lead people into the sea of love, which is the quintessential quality of God.

Section 4, “Mythical Creatures Across Time and Space: Negotiating the Bestiary,” opens with Marilyn E. Burton’s (2020) essay, “Man as Creature: Allusions to Classical Beasts in N. D. Wilson’s *Ashtown Burials*.” Wilson, through his protagonist’s, Brendan’s, journey to America and his encounter with dangerous beings, questions the human and the monstrous haecceity, to conclude that monstrosity dwells within our human selves, which are conquered by arrogance and greed. On the contrary, the diverse beasts in *Ashtown Burials* (2011–), as every God’s creation, are not by definition evil.

Daniel A. Nkemleke and Divine Che Neba (2020) search for, as the title of their chapter suggest, “Human Categories in Oral Tradition in Cameroon.” The authors examine African mythical creatures which comprise a part of the everyday rituals of the tribes and perform a significant role in shaping their identity. The similarities found between Cameroonian mythical motifs and

Graeco-Roman ones, especially about the water nymphs, can be considered as indications of the existence of universal patterns in the human psyche. On the other hand, these motifs, adapted to certain behavioural patterns, reveal identity-model particularities in time and space.

Jerzy Axer and Jan Kieniewicz (2020) present the chapter “The Wobo’s Itinerary: There and Back Again.” Wobo, a mythical figure from the Kenyan interior, performs a key role in one of the most famous children’s and young adults’ books in Poland, *In Desert and Wilderness* by the Polish Nobel Prize winner, Henryk Sienkiewicz (1911), which aimed to instil patriotism and courage in the young generation without a state. On the other hand, Wobo’s local transformations, neither human nor animal, traced *in situ* by the researchers, generate a new myth-creation phenomenon which could as well be appropriated to the literary imagination.

Małgorzata Borowska (2020), in her essay, “The Awakening of the κνώδαλα, or Inside a Great Fish Belly,” investigates the marine monsters – from their appearance in Greek archaic poetry up to *Pinocchio* by Carlo Collodi (1883). The Homeric voracious sea-beasts, the κνώδαλα of the poet Alcman (7 c. B.C.E.), Biblical Jonah’s adventure in a fish belly, the whales from *A True Story* by Lucian of Samosata (2 c. C.E.), and the ‘big fish’ in *The Thousand and One Nights* are only some of the predecessors of *Pinocchio’s Terribile Pescecane*. Collodi’s innovation lies in the fact that his hero found his way out through the anus of the beast to adjust to the happy ending demands of the writer’s young audience.

Adam Łukaszewicz’s (2020) chapter, “Fantastic Creatures Seen by a Shipwrecked Sailor and by a Herdsman,” takes us to Egypt. The scholar presents two Egyptian tales as a component part of the ancient mythical body. He claims that the East, as the homeland of the oldest fairy tales, provides a huge repository of hybrid and bizarre animals that fill the pages of children’s books. The roots of such tales with strange animals inhabiting the human world must have their origins in the Palaeolithic era. Nevertheless, in our modern world, having explored and scientifically explained all natural phenomena, it seems that there is no place left for them, else than imagination or far outer space.

Robert A. Sucharski (2020), in his essay, “Stanisław Pagaczewski and His Tale(s) of the Wawel Dragon,” examines the place and the role of dragons in children’s literature. Then, he follows the transformations of the Wawel Dragon, starting from the 12th century Wincenty Kadłubek’s story to *The Romance of Alexander* (written by an unknown writer, perhaps in the 3rd century C.E.), and its incorporation into Pagaczewski’s books (1965–1982) in which the Dragon is turned into a brilliant inventor, a friendly figure for children, and a descendant

of a Greek *émigré*. This last detail insinuates the imperceptible testimony of the Greek mythical heritage in Polish culture.

Helen Lovatt's (2020) essay, "Fantastic Beasts and Where They Come From: How Greek Are Harry Potter's Mythical Animals?," looks for the origins and the similarities of the *Harry Potter* series' bestiary with Greek mythology. From *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (2001), published as a fictional Hogwarts textbook, we learn that out of the 63 magical beasts described therein 13 are Greek, though many others (e.g. Phoenix, Sphinx, dragons) have evident connections to Greek mythology too. Nevertheless, all beasts have an innate duality, just like Harry's own identity, blurring the boundaries of the binary opposition between humanity and monstrosity. Finally, Lovatt points out to the radically different genealogy of the creatures presented in the film *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* by David Yates (2016), where the existing, known mythologies are replaced by Rowling's own inventions.

The last section, "And the Chase Goes On: The Monsters of Visual Culture," explores creatures' resurgence in popular media. Elżbieta Olechowska (2020) begins the section with the chapter "New Mythological Hybrids Are Born in *Bande Dessinée*: Greek Myths as Seen by Joann Sfar and Christophe Blain." She traces the elements of Classical Antiquity in the innovative French comic book universe of the last decades, manipulated and parodied to make the audience reflect upon contemporary issues. In a recent French comic book trilogy *Socrate le demi-chien* [Socrates the Half-Dog] – *Héraclès* [Heracles] (2002), *Ulysse* [Odysseus] (2004), and *Œdipe à Corinthe* [Oedipus in Corinth] (2009) – the concept of being a monster is ridiculed and overturned since the only interesting beast is Socrates, half-dog, half-philosopher, who undertakes the role of the narrator.

Hanna Paulouskaya (2020), in "Mythical Beasts Made Soviet: Adaptation of Greek Mythology in Soviet Animation of the 1970s," comments on a Soviet animated series in which the myth scattered with propaganda was used as an ideological mechanism to compose an ideal role model for the communist ideology. The first Soviet references to Greek and Roman mythology on the screen are to be found in the 1960s. The animations under investigation, created by Aleksandra Snezhko-Blotskaia, were named after five famous mythical heroes, all corresponding to the magical-tale schema, and used an elevated epic language. Another common characteristic was the 'un-scariness' of the monsters which were the heroes' enemies (or, in other words, the nation's enemies), praising the heroism of a human being – determined and committed to his values.

Amanda Potter's (2020) essay is titled "Bringing Classical Monsters to Life on BBC Children's Television: Gorgons, Minotaurs, and Sirens in *Doctor Who*,

The Sarah Jane Adventures, and *Atlantis*.” The longevity and the popularity of ancient Greek monsters are confirmed by their key presence in certain television series with high viewer ratings. Alien Gorgons in *The Sarah Jane Adventures* (2007–2011), a sympathetic and human-like Minotaur, sirens as healers, and a supporting Medusa in *Atlantis* (2013–2015) and *Doctor Who* (1963–) introduce themselves to the modern audience anew, absolved of ancient sins. The classical monsters’ counterparts claim our sympathy deservedly, as they reshape and restore their ancestral reputation.

Konrad Dominas’s (2020) chapter is “The Internet and Popular Culture: The Reception of Mythical Creatures in the Context of Multimedia and Interactive Materials for Children.” He is occupied with the internet as a space for publishing and sharing content about classical mythology but also as a reception channel. He brings forward the subject of monstrosity in the internet culture, where the entwining of time and space is commonplace, using representative examples of animated films (the *Transformers* series) and computer games (*Legends of Olympus: Gods & Magic Hero Adventure* by Frismos Games, 2015), where mythical beasts coexist with modern hybrids in a basically transmedia intertextual cyberspace.

Katarzyna Marciniak (2020b) provides the final touch to the volume with her essay, “Chasing Mythical Muppets: Classical Antiquity according to Jim Henson.” In the closing chapter, she discusses the life achievements of Jim Henson: *The Muppet Show* (1976–1981), the television miniseries *The Storyteller* (1987–1988), and the feature film *Labyrinth* (1986), all rich in mythological references. Henson managed to revive the ancient power of myths and adjust it to television to help us broaden our understanding of the world. The mythological elements dispersed in his work, though humorous or even carnivalesque at times, require an adequate viewer acquainted with mythology to fully appreciate them. At the same time, they aspire to educate, awaken altruistic sentiments, and inspire a positive attitude to a life focused on what really matters: emotions towards other beings.

To conclude, the volume has offered us a journey back and forth in time and all over the globe. From England to Poland, to Greece and Russia and then to Cameroon, to Kenya and Australia, just to mention some of the destinations, and from ancient times to medieval ones and to the present day, the reader meets representative, not to say emblematic, cases of mythical monsters’ revival in a wide variety of circumstances. As the mythical monsters do not follow a single and homogeneous interpretive course, the variety of meanings evoked by them reveals the complexity of their nature and, even more, the diverse scholarly perspectives of the contributors. The chapters of each section

complement each other and highlight different aspects of the overarching subject. It is a comprehensive and well-composed volume addressed to various audiences, not only to the researchers in this field.

Having completed the tour of the volume, one ends up with the feeling that albeit he/she/they performed the complete cycle of the reading adventure, still they find themselves in the inner circle of an ever-extending system of potential concentric circles. The reason for this is that the highly interesting and unknown aspects of the monsters examined above seem to be just some of the possible threads of the tangled skein of children's and young adults' culture, which has still a lot to unroll. Alluring, fascinating, and controversial as they are, monsters will keep haunting our imagination, questioning our state of humanness, and challenging our limits.

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