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INTRODUCTION

Monstrous Harry: Prolegomenon to Teratology

In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, the second book of the series created by J. K. Rowling (1998), a monster enters the imagination of the students and teachers of Hogwarts, a School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. When the janitor's cat, Mrs Norris, gets petrified and sentences written in blood appear on the school walls, the legend of Salazar Slytherin's Chamber of Secrets comes to life. In an unknown place somewhere in the castle, a giant monster awaits the heir of his former master.[1] Together, they ought to 'clean' Hogwarts from those who are not 'pure-blood' witches and wizards as they are a disgrace to the wizardry kind. Here, the monster plays the role of a hunter and executer of children, adults, nonhuman animals,[2] and ghosts. It appears out of nowhere, unseen and unheard, having one goal – to kill.

At first, no one knows what this monster looks like, or whether it really exists. In the past, when the Chamber of Secrets was opened for the first time, Hagrid, the half-giant, half-human, was expelled from Hogwarts. He has been accused of releasing a deadly spider, an Acromantula, that had allegedly killed one of the students. Now, Harry, able to speak Parseltongue, is accused of being Slytherin's heir who secretly uses the legendary monster to eliminate muggles from the school. Walking down

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[1] After visiting Aragog, the 'monster suspect' in the Forbidden Forest, Harry observes that the giant spider was afraid to say the real monster's name (Rowling, 1998: 206). The boy thinks: "The creature that was lurking somewhere in the castle [...] sounded like a sort of monster Voldemort – even other monsters didn't want to name it" (208). Such a comparison highlights the 'fluidity' of a monster as a concept, which can be applied to any type of creature – human and nonhuman (see Chapter II).

[2] The term 'nonhuman animals' (without a dash, after Kari Weil, 2012) will appear again in this book, especially in Chapter II. However, it is worth pointing out straight away that this term is essential among animal studies scholars (inter alia Linzey, 2017). It underlines the fact that humans are animals as well. 'Nonhuman animals' become a part of a non-anthropocentric attempt to discuss issues concerning all animals. Sometimes I use the term animals to avoid repetition, although I am fully aware that it is an outdated phrase.

the corridors of Hogwarts, Harry encounters students "skittering around him [...] as though he was about to sprout fangs or spit poison" (Rowling, 1998: 157). Being different, not normal, makes both characters (Hagrid and Harry) suspicious, nearly as monstrous as the mysterious beast, lurking in the castle. The concept of monstrosity smoothly switches its focus: from an imaginary monster to its hypothetical master.

Monstrosities appear in the *Harry Potter* series quite frequently, including those inspired by Greek and Roman mythology, and *The Chamber of Secrets* might be in fact the most 'monstrous' of all the novels. As this book aims to present how ancient monstrosity resonates with that of the turn of the 21st century, the presence of *Harry Potter* seems to be almost mandatory.[3] Not only because the series has proven to be extremely popular[4] but also because of the distinct occurrence of the monstrosity that has permeated Rowling's narrative. Thus, the treatise opens with a story about the Boy Who Lived, and who marked a trail of interpretation for every other monster present in this book.[5]

Joanna Lipińska's (2009) statement that "[...] wizards are a very closed and xenophobic society, denying rights to other creatures that possess the powers of magic, and they conceal themselves from muggles" (117) can be arguable.[6] The storyworld of *Harry Potter* is complex and sometimes contradictory. The wizarding society is closed, of course, but the adjective 'xenophobic' might be too strong to describe its members' attitude towards outsiders. Alyssa Hunziker (2013) underlines the complexity of the wizarding society by stating:

> Ethnically, wizards and non-magical humans (muggles) are shown to have divergent cultural practices, which outlaws any wizard from performing magical acts in the presence of non-magical humans. In addition to this

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[3]   However, it will not appear in every chapter.

[4]   Even though the *Harry Potter* series continues to be one of the most popular subjects among scholars of children's and young adult literature, monstrosity does not seem to be the leading thread of interpretation, which other motifs, like narrative structures, (Behr, 2005; Le Lievre, 2003) or feminist aspects (Mayes-Elma, 2006; Wasilewska, 2014) appear to be. In my book, I analyse a fair amount of work by J. K. Rowling. When I had started working on the collected material, the said author has not yet posted the series of transphobic tweets (and the blog post). Despite my admiration and sentiment to Rowling's work, I would like to state that acknowledging it, I did not intent to legitimise claims released by the said author in social media. On the contrary, I see all non-normative people (all from the LGBTQ+ community) as included to the monstrous discourse, celebrating the otherness of each other, rejecting an artificial notion of normativity.

[5]   Hence, the brackets with specific chapters of the book appear.

[6]   The authors of *The Ultimate Harry Potter and Philosophy: Hogwarts for Muggles* (Irwin, Bassham, 2010) proposed some issues related to the crisis of power and the alienation of wizards from other communities. They also address issues of patriotism, Hogwarts' internal politics and the desire for power. Many of them relate their analyses to the ancient tradition.

> division of the human race into two separate communities, the human characters in the wizarding world are shown to be further divided by issues of blood status and family lineage, and interschool house affiliation. (54)

The reason why wizards and witches isolate themselves from muggles is not necessarily ingrained in hatred or the necessity to possess some sort of power, as Lipińska claims. They also want to protect themselves from the judgement and misunderstanding of nonmagical people who would presumably be a threat to the world of magic. The scholar argues that wizards "treat every other group as an 'other'" (Lipińska, 2009: 119), but she does not reflect on the fact of them being monsters themselves. It is worth taking a closer look at this magical and nonmagical co-dependency and check who is strange to whom. One might even wonder: is it not ultimately a conflict of monsters against monsters?

The very beginning of the first novel in the *Harry Potter* series, *The Philosopher's Stone* (Rowling, 1997), clearly points out that the Dursleys represent all that is normative in this world, and that they are very much afraid of any form of abnormality (7). What makes them uneasy at first are animals doing bizarre things, things that animals usually do not do, e.g. a cat reading a map (8) and owls flying in the city during the day (8–9, 10). Nevertheless, the Dursleys themselves are created as caricatures of middle-class suburban Brits:

> He [Vernon Dursley] was a big, beefy man with hardly any neck, although he did have a very large moustache. Mrs. Dursley was thin and blonde and had nearly twice the usual amount of neck, which came in very useful as she spent so much of her time craning over garden fences, spying on the neighbours. (7)

And also later on:

> Dudley looked a lot like Uncle Vernon. He had a large pink face, not much neck, small, watery blue eyes, and thick blond hair that lay smoothly on his thick, fat head. Aunt Petunia often said that Dudley looked like a baby angel – Harry often said that Dudley looked like a pig in a wig. (21)

Vernon has no neck and an enormous moustache, while Petunia has "**an unusual amount of neck**" (emphasis added). Harry perceives Dudley as barely human. Those hyperboles underline the strange look of the Dursleys and sing into the concept of monstrosity, which in some cases is based on redundancy or excessiveness (see Chapter I). Despite being portrayed as monsters, they see such a creature in their unwanted part of the family, Harry Potter, whom they perceive as abnormal. In *The Chamber of Secrets* (Rowling, 1998) we read: "Ever since Harry had come home for the summer holidays, Uncle Vernon had been treating him like a bomb that might go off at any

moment, because Harry *wasn't a* normal boy. As a matter of fact, he was as not normal as it is possible to be" (8). His abnormality is to be contained in his room (before – in the cupboard under the stairs) and hidden before other people's eyes: when business guests are about to visit the Dursleys, Harry is told to sit in his room and pretend not to exist (10).

After being 'caged' by his family, Harry has a dream:

> He dreamed that he was on show in a zoo, with a card reading 'Underage Wizard' attached to his cage. People goggled through the bars at him as he lay, starving and weak, on a bed of straw. [...] Then the Dursleys appeared and Dudley rattled the bars of the cage, laughing at him. (Rowling, 1997: 22)

Harry Potter's position described in his dream reminds us of a curiosity cage and being put on display. Treated poorly, he is a 'freak' to his family and an object of mockery. This image corresponds to the phenomenon of freak shows (see Chapter IV), in which 'abnormal' creatures, usually humans, were put on display to both scare and amaze the crowds. The comparison to a 'freak' also applies to Harry's mother, the only witch in her family, as recalled by her sister Petunia:

> 'I was the only one who saw her for what she was – a freak! [...] Then she met that Potter at school and they left and got married and had you, and of course I knew you'd be just the same, just as strange, just as – as – abnormal [...].' (44)

Such an observation takes us back to Lipińska's statement about the wizards being xenophobic, while it could easily be applied to nonmagical people as well. Before Harry joined the Dursleys' household, the muggles' intentions were expressed very clearly: "This boy was another good reason for keeping the Potters away; they didn't want Dudley mixing with a child like that" (7). The concept of 'mixing' children who come from different social or ethnic groups is evident. However, another discourse enters here, as it reappears in the third book, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (Rowling, 1999). There, Vernon's sister, Aunt Marge, compares Harry to a pup that comes from a bitch that is not pure-bred (24). The intentional separation of children is almost animalistic, as the goal is to prevent influences that one might have on another (most accurately: Harry, coming from a 'bad breed,' would have a negative influence on 'perfect' Dudley). Not only is Harry a monstrous child (see Chapter VI), a 'freak,' he is also compared to a nonhuman animal (see Chapter II), not matching the standards of the muggle society.

It appears contradictory that in Rowling's storyworld being 'normal' means being the monsters presented above: having long necks, no necks at all, or no magical abilities. The author of the *Harry Potter* series frequently provokes her readers to re-think their notion of 'normality' by applying

monstrosity to her characters. It refers to both muggles and wizards. As Hunziker (2013) points out:

> Wizards' "abnormality" is ultimately defined in the ethnic and cultural differences between wizards and muggles, particularly though the former's lack of "normal clothes" and differing terminology [...]. Even this difference in lexicon is so disparate that muggles and wizards seem to speak two separate languages, as one can often not understand the other, signifying that the difference between these two human groups is strained in a similar way to the divides that exist between magical creatures and magical humans. (56)

Further on, the scholar recalls the interpretations of the wizards–muggles relationships. They would be a new form of colonialism and orientalism, as wizards are a threat to nonmagical people as a separate society, less worthy than theirs (56). Nonetheless, Hunziker asserts that: "Rowling's depiction of exclusivity within the non-magical and magical human communities demonstrates that, despite their distinct differences, these two communities can be united through a **shared space of exclusion**" (57; emphasis added). On the one hand, this space of intersection, to some extent, becomes the subject of this book. The exclusion, on the other hand, becomes the main feature of a monster as a figure studied here.

The construct of being normal or abnormal functions not only among muggles and is aimed at the wizards and witches. When Harry meets Draco Malfoy for the first time in Madam Malkin's Robes for All Occasions, a Slyther to be speaks about Hagrid as a 'savage' (Rowling, 1997: 60) and refers to himself as a representative of 'true wizards,' one of 'their kind.' Therefore, not only wizards are excluded from the muggle society, and vice versa. There is a more profound social detachment among magical people – 'true wizards' and those that come from muggle families (see Chapter V). Also, the school division reflects the exclusive character of communities forming within the wizarding structures, as school houses have separate dormitories, protected by constantly changing passwords (Hunziker, 2013: 57–58). The exclusion concerning Harry being 'half-half' (with a wizard father and muggle-born mother) acquires another form here: exclusion according to ethnic origins that could be interpreted as racism. It is evident in Hermione Granger's case, a muggle who became a witch, even if she was not culturally (and apparently also genetically) predestined to do so (see Chapter V).

Not only wizards and muggles are often marginalised. There is also another group that is excluded from both societies: nonhuman animals (see Chapter II). One of the examples would be the snake that Harry meets in the zoo, even before he finds out about the Wizarding World. However, he discovers his ability to talk to snakes, which allows him to get to know an imprisoned reptile.

The snake,[7] culturally associated with sin and evil, is called by J. E. Cirlot (2001) an Apocalyptic Beast (14). At first glance, it would not make a good pet. Nevertheless, it is the first character in the series that Harry creates a special bond with. As we read:

> Harry moved in front of the tank and looked intently at the snake. He wouldn't have been surprised if it had died of boredom itself – no company except stupid people drumming their fingers on the glass trying to disturb it all day long. It was worse than having a cupboard as a bedroom, where the only visitor was Aunt Petunia hammering on the door to wake you up; at least he got to visit the rest of the house. (Rowling, 1997: 25)

Clearly, from the boy's perspective, the situation of both of them is quite similar, which is also reflected in Harry's dream, recalled earlier. Harry and the snake are 'slaves,' kept by humans in cages. The former is more privileged as *Homo sapiens*, while the latter is kept for people's amusement. It seems that they are the only ones that understand each other, and not only because of Harry's ability to talk to snakes. The boy – unknowingly – eventually makes the glass vanish and frees the snake from its misery. Their relationship corresponds to the concept of a child-animal unity (see Chapter VI), as they both – culturally – are excluded from the main discourse.

The snake is also an animal that connects Harry with his mortal enemy, Lord Voldemort. Jen Harrison (2018) rightly draws attention to the Dark Lord and the snake (Nagini) relationship:

> The question of Voldemort's power as a dark wizard hinges, similarly, on his particular and specific power over an animal species: snakes. This power is one of the abilities that marks him as different from other wizards, and in that difference supposedly lies his extraordinary potency. Throughout the series Voldemort is physiologically and spiritually entangled with snakes, who keep him alive and embodied when he is weak (Goblet 14, 567), symbolise his power, and even house a part of his soul. Indeed, it comes as no shock in Harry Potter and the Half-Blood

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[7]   Nevertheless, snakes are not always welcome in Rowling's storyworld. The author used their image – culturally stereotyped as evil and dangerous – in the creation of Lord Voldemort. Throughout the series he had two snake pets: Basilisk, inspired by classical antiquity (to be referred to later in the analysis), a monstrous beast answering to the heir of Slytherin, and Nagini, slightly smaller, a no less deadly snake, thanks to which Dark Lord survived his most difficult times (he was drinking her milk while he was just a shadow of a man). Nagini's status is explicitly described by Rowling (2000) at the beginning of *The Goblet of Fire*: "The snake [...] was curled up on the rooting hearth-rug, like some horrible travesty of a pet" (18). The example of using the snake's cultural image here mirrors the complicated status of the animal: on the one hand a creature that has a special, literary magical bond with a human, whereas on the other, it is a deadly monster seeking doom of her master's enemies.

Prince to learn that the final Horcrux (apart from Harry himself) is Nagini the snake (473): crucially, her entanglement with Voldemort has made her more human even as it has emphasised her master's nonhuman aspects. What is telling about Voldemort's decision to make a Horcrux from this animal is that it indicates not only a willingness to exploit animals but also, to a certain degree, his dependence upon them; having so forcefully removed himself from established understandings of human nature, he has made himself dependent on the nonhuman for an understanding of who and what he is. As a result, Voldemort has become something that is both more and less than human. (329–330)

According to Harrison, Voldemort is a "monstrous hybrid" in Jacques Derrida's understanding, "whose hybrid nature not only blurs the boundaries of human ontology but also gives voice and power to the animals aligned with him" (330). This proves the importance of the monster analysis, especially within the frame of intersectionality, to reject classification and examine the standards of an anthropocentric point of view. Also, the 'hybrid' becomes the perfect exemplification of intersectionality, as it is a literal example of a cross-species creature that forces whoever encounters it to redefine their notion of a 'monster' or of whatever such a creature represents.

Noel Chevalier (2005) points out that Rowling "is taking it back to a set of paradigms familiar, at least in literature, through which she can explore issues of social and political justice" (401). Clearly, her work proved to be very influential, as far as social and political matters are concerned.[8] However, what Chevalier also highlights is the fact that:

Rowling's literary heritage, therefore, includes not only children's fantasy and the school stories of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but also the Jacobin fiction of the 1790s and its descendants, particularly the fiction of William Godwin and Mary Shelley. [...] Rowling returns to the ideals of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution to re-examine issues of social and political justice, which she clearly believes have not been solved, and may have been complicated by, technological developments of the twentieth century. (401–402)

Rowling, as the scholar claims, is aware of the late 18th- and early 19th-century cultural concepts and that is why we may assume she knew a great deal about the concept of monstrosity from that time and incorporated those ideas in her narrative.

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[8]   Brycchan Carey (2003) stresses: "[...] the Harry Potter novels are among the most politically engaged novels to have been written for children in recent years. Indeed, the central concept of the novels, Harry's personal struggle with the dark lord Voldemort, provides a site for discussion of a democratic society's response to elitism, totalitarianism, and racism" (105).

Not only are the works by Rowling prevalent to this day and have a significant impact on many young minds but also their content, very often based on classical antiquity (Olechowska, 2016, Spencer, 2015) predominantly reflects the idea of inclusiveness and general acceptance. The *Harry Potter* series redefines what it means to be a 'human.' Harrison (2018) points out that:

> Throughout the Harry Potter corpus, the humanist drive of the development narrative is frequently disrupted by instances of posthuman hybridity that challenge both the viability and the desirability of being "purely" human. These disruptions, however, do not only broaden the interpretation of "human" [...], they also, importantly, highlight the limitations of a culture founded on liberal humanist philosophy [...] While a broadening of the ontological category of "human" advocates for greater empathy and inclusivity, erasing that category altogether calls into question the very foundations of liberal humanist culture. Furthermore, the promising disruptions that are only partially developed in the core seven novels seem, in the newer additions to the corpus, to be more prominently foregrounded. (326)

Being half-muggle, half-wizard, not assimilated in the Wizarding World, but also unfit for the muggle reality, **Harry Potter poses to be an intersectional character** that chooses the magical community and actively tries to fulfil his social purpose of being a "Chosen One" (Hunziker, 2013: 54). Even though his status is seemingly high (he is a hero who defeated Voldemort), he is repeatedly excluded from the wizarding community. As it was stated at the beginning of the introduction, in *The Chamber of Secrets*, Harry is supposed to be Slytherin's heir, hunting muggle-born students. The impression of him being a 'monster' is intensified by his ability to speak Parseltongue, a language not entirely accepted in the wizarding community (58). Taking into account him being neglected in the Dursleys' house and treated like a 'freak,' "Harry can be seen as an excluded figure in both the wizarding and muggle worlds as he is forced into silence by those who have a higher standing than he does" (58). **Harry Potter is a monster,** and, hopefully, the first chapter of the analysis will explain why.[9]

Mythical Monsters – Signs of Exclusion

This book aims to resolve to what extent mythical[10] monsters in children's and young adult culture become signs corresponding to the representatives

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[9]   Liminality is another category that rounds off the status of a generic character (Cohen, 1996: 6). However, I do not use this term in favour of intersectionality, thus indicating more the methodology of my research, not only the status of the character in question.

[10]   I use the words: 'mythical' and 'mythological' interchangeably in order to avoid repetition, but each time I mean what relates to Greek and Roman mythology, unless

of groups excluded from society, discussed in the subsequent chapters. It also asks the question to what extent the excluded characters, thanks to their 'monstrous' creation, become emancipated and gain a voice, and to what extent they remain isolated, aware of the impossibility of integration with a society that cultivates 'normality' in its broadest sense. During the analyses, I would like to ask how monstrosity presented in children's and young adult culture (literature, films, and TV-series) comprises constructs of exclusion concerning classical mythology.

Judith Butler (2008) wrote that **there is no such thing as being normal**, constant, as everyone lives within the society as an 'impossible' unit. This 'impossibility' would concern the fact that it is not possible to provide the equality of the rights to everyone, according to their needs and expectations (12). Monsters, among others, now represent a wider diversity than before (Staff, 2019). However, the situation is still not 'ideal.' Monstrosity and the research on it – here, named by me and some other scholars (see Chapter I) after a medical term, **teratology** – is a very complex phenomenon. That is why the analysis of mythical beasts appears in the first chapter of the book, as an attempt to gather the most important claims and examine how monsters can be signs of exclusion.

There is one more term that occasionally will appear in my analysis, i.e. **intersectionality**. As it is a product of the early 21st century (Collins, Bilge, 2018: 1),[11] there is still no ultimate compendium or definition explaining what intersectionality is. Essentially, the study of intersections of various categories and cultural areas ought to show the broader concept of any phenomenon. It would also be a tool "to examine the production of difference and inequality in a given historical constellation from a situated point of view both synchronically and diachronically" (Kallenberg et al., 2013: 31). The authors of the compendium *Intersectionality und Kritik* claim: "[...] there is no question that relations of class, gender, race and sexuality are linked in one way or another" (22) as this type of research "emerged from the struggles of second wave feminism" (Puar, 2013: 373). Also, Jasbir K. Puar writes that "intersectionality holds fast as a successful model of political transformation," being popular among feminist and queer studies as well (372). As I agree with both of those claims, there is a necessity to add other categories that can intersect as well, such as animality, age, health, etc. Moreover, the political aspect in intersectional studies is not the only one,

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stated otherwise. In English, these words are commonly used interchangeably, although there are distinct theories on their differentiation ("Mythical" Cambridge Dictionary 2022, online, "Mythological" Merriam Webster 2022, online).

[11]   It would be the time when intersectionality became popular among researchers. However, one of the first articles on this matter would be Kimberlé Crenshaw's "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: a Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics" (1989).

as it can also be useful for the study of culture or, maybe more so, sociology. In my judgement, **the figure of a monster is intersectional** par excellence, its essence being to cross the boundaries of knowledge and evoke doubt concerning categorisation. However, since we do not have the studies of such a co-relation, and my methodology focuses mainly on teratology, I use intersectionality selectively and only where I think it is accurate.

Carl Gustav Jung (1968) stated: "Myth is the primordial language natural to these psychic processes, and no intellectual formulation comes anywhere near the richness and expressiveness of mythical imaginary" (25). Also, Roland Barthes (1972) wrote that: "myth is a type of speech" but not "any type": a "system of communication," that it is "a message," "a mode of signification, a form" (107; see also Malinowski, 1982; Mieletinski, 1981). I believe that **studying teratology mimics learning a new language**. When supported by the myth – also in the meaning of classical mythology – it can bring out new meanings of the world that surrounds us. This book is an attempt to learn the alphabet of **a teratological language** – an alphabet that is not finished or, to be exact, 'finishable.' In each chapter, I propose several areas of cultural research, applicable to youth culture and responding to the challenges of the 21st century, including monsters in the mainstream discourse.

In order to investigate monstrosity in the context of children's culture, it is necessary to look at popular culture, with particular emphasis on its relationship with myth, including classical mythology. The following part of the introduction will be an attempt to justify the use of reception studies and present its connection to popular culture.

Climbing the Pop-Cultural Olympus

Myths have the power to construct culture, and culture has the power to construct myths (Struck, 2019). Acknowledging such a thesis, we might come to terms with the fact that despite the general view on this subject, mythology did not die with ancient times (Campbell, Kudler, 2017), and popular culture[12]

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[12]   I understand popular culture after Marcel Danesi (2015) who writes: "In the history of human cultures, pop culture stands out as atypical. It is culture by the people and for the people. In contrast to historical culture, it rejects both the supremacy of tradition and many of the socially based cultural practices of the past, as well as the pretensions of intellectualist tendencies within contemporary traditional culture. Pop culture has always been highly appealing for this very reason, bestowing on common people the assurance that culture is for everyone, not just for an elite class of designated artists or authority figures. It is thus populist, popular, and public." (4) However, there are many approaches to popular culture, not least because of its national character. One of the leading works concerning pop culture in Polish research is *Słownik kultury popularnej* by Tadeusz Żabski (2006). Other to be reckoned with would be by Jakub Zdzisław Lichański (et al., 2015) and Anna Gemra (2015). However, I focus on Western research for the most part (except for the works of Wieczorkiewicz, which are paramount for me).

was not born in the 1970s.[13] As Marcel Danesi (2013) claims: "Popular forms of entertainment have always existed" (3, series preface), and even if the term: "popular culture" came into use later, the phenomenon itself was familiar to many, also to the ancient Greeks and Romans (Grig, 2017). Myths and popular culture have functioned in symbiotic cooperation since antiquity, and it does not seem as if those stories were about to end[14].

The symbiosis of myths and popular culture can be found in texts that, openly or not, explore their potential and take advantage of both classical heritage and pop-cultural capability of attracting the crowds. As Christine Walde (2016) points out:

> Popular culture, in particular, is instructive in this context, because it reflects widespread cultural themes and assumptions more than elite discourse does, as the latter, in principle, does not need to aim for consensus. a special case is, in my opinion, cultural content that derives from Graeco-Roman culture, especially when it is not necessarily identical to what is taught at school and university. If we want to draw a realistic picture of the reception and transformation of the classics, we need to extend our view to these areas. (366)

Being considered a part of so-called 'high culture,'[15] (Rose, 2001: 294), classical mythology found its legitimate place among popular texts that

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[13]   It is extremely hard to determine when popular culture was born (as I claim it always existed), but it seems crucial that academic interest in this matter was born in the 1960s and 1970s (Hinds, 2006: 1). In my book, I also do not attempt to define popular culture, as it is a topic for a separate study.

[14]   The question of the connection between antiquity and popular culture, or at least some variation of it that existed in ancient times, requires in-depth study. I am not arguing that pop culture as we know it today existed in antiquity; I am merely signaling a trope for examining its poetics in ancient times.

[15]   Here, we may be doubtful whether popular culture and a classical text should be treated as equally valuable cultural products, as traditionally one belongs to the 'low,' the other 'high' sphere of art, music, and literature. However, modern cultural criticism, originating in Marxist doctrine, discards such an approach, "for all cultural productions can be analysed to reveal the *cultural work* they perform – that is, the ways in which they shape our experience by transmitting or transforming ideologies, which means, of course, the role of cultural productions in the circulation of power" (Tyson, 2006: 296). Traditionally assigned to 'high' culture, classical antiquity with its mythology, thanks to reception studies, reclaims its rightful place among popular texts. In my view, the distinction between 'high' and 'low' cultures is archaic and artificial, as often cultural texts explore both traditions and thus can be qualified in both categories. Nevertheless, there is a field of studies examining the relationships between both 'high' and 'popular' texts. The example would be the publication on the Victorian Era and Classical Antiquity, where Simon Goldhill (2011) gives a hint of what 'high' and popular cultures mean: "This book does not merely consider works of high culture or works of popular culture, but also focuses on the relation *between* high and popular cultures, and the awkward transitions and tensions between the elite and the demonic, which constantly provoke the unsettling question of *how shared* culture is." (15) Goldhill also considers reception studies to be: "the

are researched together within reception studies (Mikołajczak, Dominas, Dymczyk, 2015: 5). Investigating this area would be following Walde's postulate to "extend our view" of what we consider a proper study and legitimately acknowledge the research on children's and young adult culture. Suppose we reflect on the importance and the potential of both popular culture and the classical tradition. In that case, we may conclude similarly to Owen Hodkinson and Helen Lovatt (2018) that:

> Popular culture shapes classics and classicists: it should therefore be studied. From popular history books through edutainment products to games and films, popular culture sustains classics and forms its future students and scholars. (4)

This claim once again proves that classical antiquity and popular culture (within it also popular children's and young adult culture)[16] are in many cases inextricably linked, and as such, should not be studied in separation. Moreover, that is what I attempt to do in this book when analysing the construct of a monster.

If popular culture shapes classics – and if classics shape popular culture – it is nearly impossible to determine which of those constructs (classical and popular) were born first. Similarly, it is also hard to point out which myths or fairy tales, also very important in shaping the popular image of a monster, appeared first (Zipes, 1994: 3; more on the 'birth of a monster' in Chapter I). Myths, a vital part of ancient culture, like fairy tales (Hallett, Karasek, 2014), also strongly present in popular culture, are products of the oral tradition. Passed from man to man, generation after generation, they have become common stories, with no author or one 'right' source to be claimed as the 'original.'[17] As Emma Bridges (2018) writes:

> When the storytellers and artists of the ancient world shaped their tales of mythical monsters – from the snake-haired Medusa to the flesh-eating Minotaur – they were creating their own new versions of stories which, by their very nature, were open to continual reinterpretation and reinvention [...]. While some modern readers [...] might think of particular versions of stories or character as canonical, the notion that there was only one 'correct' way of imagining Scylla or the Sirens would doubtless seem strange to those ancient creative practitioners whose business it was to offer fresh interpretations of traditional stories. (1)

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slippage between elite and popular culture of classical motifs or narratives" (15) which also, in my opinion, is not always the case, as I attempt to present in the following subchapter.

[16]   Youth culture is not in its entirety a part of popular culture. However, many texts – also those presented in this book – are inspired by popular themes, hence its connection to popular culture theories. For more on the subject, see for example: Castro, Clark, 2019.

[17]   In popular culture we quite rarely encounter 'pure' antiquity.

In this paragraph, where Bridges highlights the problem of myths' 'originality,' I believe she ultimately points to the fact that the mythological canon is continuously fractured by the process of adaptation. As Dorota Michułka and Ryszard Waksmund (2012) write: "Adaptation as [an] *act of perception* becomes a sort of a palimpsest that reminds us of other works from our cultural memory" (17). They also point to the pleasure drawn from the recipients' recognition of already known features: members of the audience play with the text or even become co-creators of beloved works. Similarly, a myth would be the result of 'adapting' heard stories and applying their content to one's personal needs and the current context. This is also a distinctive characteristic of popular culture. It offers a variety of content which the recipients might liberally use for their purposes, unlike the elite 'high' culture, which of course can be arguable.

Myths adapt to the space and time, including geographical and cultural contexts, respond to contemporary issues, face common challenges and answer to the needs of particular recipients, just like popular culture in general. Popular culture, mostly influenced by English and American traditions,[18] has a significant impact on contemporary society.[19] At the turn of the 21st century, more people probably read the *Harry Potter* series than the whole *Iliad*, more people have seen Disney's *Hercules* (1997) than *Medea* by Lars von Trier (1988). Indeed, in popular culture, as in the culture in general, we encounter works that can be brilliant, as well as awful, but that is not an issue of this book. Not putting a particular value on any of those texts it seems quite evident that most ideas about society, politics, aesthetics, or culture, in general, come from the mass media, and popular culture is a big part of it.

There are several advantages of popular culture mentioned by various researchers. For some, it shapes minds, sets trends, and has an enormous potential to influence the wider audience. Despite its commonly underestimated status in general, at the turn of the 21st century, as John Fiske (1989) writes:

> Popular culture is the culture of the subordinated and disempowered and thus always bears within it signs of power relations, traces of the forces of domination and subordination that are central to our social system and therefore to our social experience. (4–5)

Popular culture actively responds to contemporary issues. It mirrors behaviours, recreates characters, reconstructs historical events and discusses politics. As Jane Caputi (2004) states:

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[18]   For further information, see Crothers, 2018.
[19]   Which proves, inter alia, a series of reports: #*PopJustice*, ed. by Liz Manne (2019) "that illuminates the promise and potential of popular culture strategies to advance social change."

> Pop culture is not only a meaning system enforcing the status quo. Popular, after all, comes from a Latin word meaning people. a most valuable index to what people commonly know, value, fear, remember, and believe can be found there. Oddly enough, it is also a place where things usually unspoken, things that go against established canons, can be said. (5)

Moreover, Caputi points to the vital meaning of a myth concerning popular culture:

> Eliade (1963) calls our attention to the original meaning of myth, to which, he says, Western thinkers are returning: myth as sacred, exemplary story. Sacred origin stories, even when they show up as gossip, B-movies, and cult television, are the ones that tell a group how it came to be, that bind it into a community, that furnish a sense of cosmic purpose and direction. Patriarchy, like any other social organisation, needs its "sacred stories," its version of how this world came to be, and how it will continue. So too do the variously green, gay, and goddess movements that challenge patriarchy's perpetuity. (9–10, original grammar)

Even if it seems vague, I believe that if we want to seek any kind of change in the world, popular culture might be a great help in setting the example, and if not solving the problem, at least acknowledging it and passing the message to the broadest audience possible (Mikołajczak, Dominas, Dymczyk, 2015: 6). A relatively recent example of such an accomplishment comes from Hollywood and the feminists, joined by famous actresses and actors, who raised the problem of sexual harassment and created the #MeToo movement. As far as youth culture is concerned, it has to be stressed that successful book and film series, such as *Harry Potter* (books 1997-2007; films 2001-2011) or *The Hunger Games* (books 2008-2010; films 2012-2015), have gathered devoted groups of fans (Harry Potter Alliance, Odds in Our Favour campaign), who have organised many effective protests and raised numerous critical social issues, such as economic inequality or sexual exclusions (Bird, Maher, 2018: 38–46; Skowera, 2015). Popular culture might also serve as a transmitter between classical texts which are sometimes not easily accessible due to their complicated form and language, especially for young people.

The field of research that covers the phenomenon of mythological retellings and, in its diversity, decodes narratives built upon that of classical antiquity would be reception studies. Lorna Hardwick (2003), an authority in this field, pointed out over a dozen years ago that reception studies were a "fairly recent development" (2).[20]

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[20]   Even though this is a publication from 2003, the claim of reception studies being a relatively new research area stands to 2019. However, there is an older research, e.g. by Tadeusz Zieliński (orig. 1897, 2015) that might be considered pioneer of the reception studies.

Conservative at the beginning,[21] this field of research developed in the belief that classical antiquity was 'dead' and culture was built upon the 'legacy.' However, it did not necessarily function as if it were still a significant part of it. At the turn of the 21st century, reception studies show a tendency to go in a different, more liberal direction, considering popular culture as a part of the research.[22]

In order to reach the broadest audience possible, the classical culture had to adapt to specific trends. Hardwick (2003) accurately points out:

> The diversity of ancient culture itself is now widely recognised and interest has focused on ways in which some aspects were selected and used ('appropriated') in order to give value and status to subsequent cultures and societies and to inspire new creative work. (3)

Hardwick proves than even though ancient texts might seem irrelevant, their reception and adaptations – also adaptation of mythology – carry the value of ancient times and exploit this value in further revisions. On the one hand, in most cases, there is a particular risk in adapting literary texts for movies, especially if we acknowledge the verbal-oriented approach to adaptation, according to which a text is perceived as the 'original,' or as a 'better' variant (Choczaj, 2011: 14).[23] On the other hand, as Michułka and Waksmund (2012) highlight: "[...] the new text [...] is not a replica of the original but a unique artistic work with its fresh ideological structure" (16). Małgorzata Choczaj (2011) also underlines that: "[...] a certain creator, in the moment of getting to know the original material, chooses the forms, adjusting the content to his or her needs" (15), therefore, every time we deal with a new text, with its often new creators, new ideological context and, frequently, new elements simply adjusted to the new medium.

According to Hardwick (2003), such a process of adaptation is the very core of reception studies:

> Reception studies therefore participate in the continuous dialogue between the past and the present and also require some 'lateral' dialogue in which crossing boundaries of place, of language or genre is as important as crossing those of time.
> Reception studies, therefore, are concerned not only with individual texts and their relationship with one another but also with the broader cultural process which shape and make up those relationships. (4–5)

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[21]   Conservative from today's perspective. At the beginning of reception studies, they were very progressive and were even perceived as not suitable for the noble practices of working on classical antiquity at university. See Mazurkiewicz, 2015.

[22]   E.g. the analysis of Lady Gaga's video clip in the context of Homer: Silverblank, 2018: 36.

[23]   For more about movie adaptations of ancient mythology and history, see, for example, Janka, Stierstorfer, 2017: 24; Marciniak, 2018.

Following Hardwick's thought, it might be stated that the relationship with a contemporary and 'original' text will not be a priority. However, sometimes fragments of classical texts will serve as contexts of the analysis in the search for possible interpretations. One of the reasons would be the fact that other contemporary texts frequently influence texts considered to be inspired by classical antiquity. The creators do not necessarily know about their classical roots. Therefore, this book will follow the third path of understanding reception studies, listed by Hardwick (2003),[24] which is:

> The purpose or function for which the new work or appropriation of ideas or values is made – for instance, its use as an authority to legitimate something, or someone, in the present (whether political, artistic, social, or educational or cultural in the broadest sense). (5)

The argument proposed by Hardwick is ideally compatible with functions of popular culture, proposed by formerly mentioned researchers. Just like folk and fairy tales, myths are alive; they are continually transforming, fitting into the current circumstances and needs of the particular society.[25] Thanks to that they are still 'successful' today, although not in the same form as they did in classical times. That is why reception studies, especially those related to youth culture, are vital in shaping modern and inclusive society, as a powerful myth "raises energies, galvanises actions, evokes emotions, and blinds a people into a community" (Caputi, 2004: 4). With the help of popular culture, reception studies can be unstoppable.

Reception Studies and Youth Culture

In *Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan (2005), Chiron, a centaur and the protagonist's mentor, explains: "If you were a god, how would you like being called a myth, an old story to explain lighting? What if I told you, Perseus Jackson, that someday people would call *you a* myth, just created to explain how little boys can get over losing their mothers?" (68–69). A myth appears to be something more than just a story that people once believed in (Eliade, 1963: 1–2). It is a way of existing, finding oneself in the tale, facing its challenges

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[24]   The first two focus on: 1) the process of adapting the classical source by an artist, 2) the relationship between the said process and the widely understood context (Hardwick, 2003: 5).
[25]   Jack Zipes (1994), alluding to Mircea Eliade's: *Myth and Reality*, claims that fairy tales "continue to convey mythic notions and motifs that are camouflaged" (2). Jerzy Topolski and Reinhart Koselleck point to the variability in interpretation in historiographic narrative depending on the methodological assumptions made (Blumenberg, 2006).

and encountering various obstacles. Even if they are not as friendly as one might imagine.

If in 2003 Hardwick claimed that reception studies were a relatively young discipline, the reception studies in children's and young adult culture should be perceived as even younger (Marciniak, 2016: 13–14; Maurice, 2015: 4). In the introduction to *Our Mythical Childhood… The Classics and Literature for Children and Young Adults*, Katarzyna Marciniak (2016) points towards the fact that the era of mass media has brought us closer to antiquity thanks to world-wide access to cultural texts and the ability, also for children, to comment on different works (11). Lisa Maurice (2015) also affirms that "in more recent years, with the development of fantasy literature as a subgenre of children's fiction, other works have appeared that are strongly influenced by classical elements" (1). However, if only to recall one of the most popular texts for children – *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* and *Peter and Wendy* by J. M. Barrie (1906 and 1911 respectively; analysed in Chapter VI) – we observe that classical antiquity has accompanied popular children's culture for a long time. Also, multiple 'school' mythologies (at least regarding the USA and Poland)[26] prove that antiquity was one of the priorities in early education and still is part of Western – and not only Western – cultural identity.

It would seem that it is not antiquity, or for that matter fantasy as a genre, that has become most popular in recent years (i.e. 2010s) but the interest in this area coming from the classicists. In their publications, both Marciniak and Maurice lean towards the thesis that reception studies in youth culture, if they were not begun, then they were developed in contemporary times, which relatively recent publications on this topic also confirm. As a field of studies, the reception of classical antiquity in children's and young adult culture is not yet fully developed and comprises of just a few works, alluded to in this book. Hence, if not defining it, this part will acknowledge recent studies on the said subject with the full awareness that it is still in its early stage of development.

It is hard to point to a precise moment when reception studies regarding children's and young adult culture started to develop. Although the research on classical motifs in children's and young adult culture was conducted before the name 'reception studies' was introduced, most of the compendia and monographic works appeared in the 2010s (Marciniak, 2016, Maurice, 2015, Hodkinson & Lovatt, 2018) as an attempt to gather

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[26] Although in the USA it might be Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Greek Myths: a Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys*, 1851, in the American educational system there is no ultimate handbook of mythology that every generation goes back to; in Poland it would be Jan Parandowski's *Mitologia* [Mythology], 1924, still used in schools today, although originally it was written as a handbook for teachers. However, mythologies for children and young adults are not the subject of my book and ought to be studied in a separate analysis.

some, 'old and new,' examples of works for children based on or inspired by classical thought. It is also too early to claim which volumes or projects will have the most significant impact on the further development of this discipline. However, "Our Mythical Childhood" project[27] appears to be a big step in research conducted in this particular field, with upcoming publications and unceasing interest being very promising and presenting a wide range of unresolved issues.

This book will not focus on the didactic dimension of antiquity present in children's culture. However, many scholars point out that one of the first encounters of young people with classical antiquity takes place at school. The pedagogical aspect of classical antiquity appears to be a priority in almost all the publications as if their theoretical layer was not what is most important. Writing about the development of children's culture in the context of the classics, Maurice points to the 19th-century phenomenon of English schools.[28] Nevertheless, it is Marciniak (2016), as one of the few, who connects her statement with the early development of childhood concepts:

> Leading people toward the future is also an intrinsic element of young readers' literature, one of the most important aims of which is to raise children and youth – whatever we think of their "starting position" (pure and innocent beings, little savages, or tabulae rasae) – to be wise adults, governed in their life by humanistic values. (4)

In those words and in reference to the 17th-century pedagogical strategies, Marciniak once again points to the educational or pedagogical values of literature inspired by antiquity. Classical elements in stories for young people, according to her, should lead them through life and give them moral advice. In a similar manner to Marciniak's views, Owen Hodkinson and Helen Lovatt (2018) write: "Children's literature and culture help to shape the experiences of the developing child reader, and, whether through overt didacticism or not, they also participate actively in the processes of change they sometimes represent" (3). This

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[27] As we read on the "Our Mythical Childhood" website: "The project regards the reception of Classical Antiquity in children's and young adults' culture... We consider the intersection between these two fields to be a vital space where the development of human identity takes place, both in previous epochs and in our times. Indeed, each of us has gone through the experience of childhood and many people have had contacts with Classical Antiquity as a cultural experience – transmitted as it is all over the globe and across the ages via education, through myriad interpersonal contacts, and today owing to the charm of global popular culture. Hence, the ancient tradition has built a familiar code of communication understandable in local and global contexts alike" (Marciniak, 2017, available online).

[28] "Children were brought up on the classics, which permeated not only school life but also literature designed for schoolboys and girls" (Maurice, 2015: 10).

is another example of presenting ancient tradition as a priority, not 'one of' the methods enriching the child's education. As such, claims recalled by the researchers might not be convincing considering children's literary communication or the semiotics of children's and young adult literature (Ewers, 2009). Even Jacqueline Rose, a "Socratic gadfly, fluttering around the (begrudgingly-granted) children's literature offices of the Ivory Tower," as Clémentine Beauvais (2015) recalls her (15), is rarely mentioned in the works analysing reception in children's and young adult culture; among researchers of reception studies, only Marciniak (2016) acknowledges children's literature studies (4–6; Rose appears on page 12). Morality and didactic values of the classical content are most important for researchers of the reception of youth culture.

Just like children's culture, adapting classical tradition for a young audience is a new invention, as in antiquity great artists and philosophers did not aim their works towards children (Marciniak, 2016: 4).[29] What is more, classical stories would probably still be marked as inappropriate for children, not only due to their literary complexity but also because of their violent and sexual content. Nevertheless, Maurice (2015) claims:

> Ancient Greek mythology, both in terms of the myths themselves and of ancient fables, has for a long time been a source of texts for children, a fact that is perhaps rather surprising when their often far from morally uplifting ancient versions are taken into account. (1)

Maurice suggests that the moral aspect of children's literature is most commonly associated with this very phenomenon (hence, the popularity of moral associations). Many of the mythological stories (just like in the case of folk tales, for instance) were 'adapted' according to this determinant (and others), "to make it 'age-appropriate,' and sometimes deliberately imbuing it with more or less overt moral or other didactic lessons" (Hodkinson, Lovatt, 2018: 2–3). Marciniak (2016) suggests that some "sugar-coated" versions of the stories adapted for children lack essential content, and she calls this practice "rather regrettable" (5).[30] Nevertheless, throughout the development of children's culture, classical antiquity accompanied educators and readers, forming the tradition

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[29] Some scholars claim that classical texts might be treated as also dedicated to youngsters, as they were meant to be read to become good citizens (Maurice, 2015: 3). However, this suggestion rather points to the universal character of those texts, not necessarily taking into account the child as one of the potential readers.

[30] In the European and American tradition knowledge about antiquity often comes from mythology rewritten for children that very often later becomes a point of reference and forms a general idea about classical times. This idea often clashes with the one appearing in popular culture, which might force the audience to verify classical content with the 'original' sources. The intertextual tension and conjugation of those texts result as a clear sign of postmodernism, which also includes culture for young people.

of telling old stories in a new way (6). Those new stories, from popular culture, in particular, seem to be quite powerful.

However, besides education, there are other functions of children's and young adult culture. Marciniak comes up with the vital definition of a 'classic,' with the same meaning for children's and adult culture: "[...] a classical work is embedded in the past, but oriented towards the future, addressing the recipient on both a personal and universal level and encouraging nonconformity and respect" (10). Although Marciniak admits that this definition does not fit the mainstream standards, it works well on various levels, especially if it concerns human development and personal growth, which is connected with the moral aspects of those stories. Following this path, one can risk the view that classical mythology, transmitted through popular culture, has a real impact on the formation of a young reader, viewer, player – the co-creator of a changing society.

Further on, Marciniak also mentions how antiquity can be treated as a means of inspiration. She explains: "[...] the 'inspiration' here does not mean a slavish repetition of the ancient patterns, but an intimate and dynamic dialogue with the legacy of the past to help youth face present-day challenges and to prepare them for future ones" (11). Maurice (2015) also claims that "receptions of the classical world in children's literature are not restricted solely to direct retellings of texts or recreations of the ancient world. Other more subtle influences can also be found, with allusions to the classical past for specific purposes [...] (3). The theses stated by both Marciniak and Maurice correspond to the concept of adaptation, mentioned earlier. Essentially, it does not matter whether a text was 'accurately adapted' from the original, but most of all whether it resonates with the past and what kind of new meanings it brings to contemporary culture. Also, I perceive current texts for youth inspired by antiquity, after Marciniak, in the matter of dialogue and correspondence, rather than of accuracy.

Explaining the title of her work (*Heroes and Eagles*, volume 6 in Brill's series: *Metaforms. Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity*, 2015), Lisa Maurice writes about "two most common ways in which this reception appears." That would be the "portrayal of the Greek heroic world of classical mythology" and portrayal "of the Roman imperial presence" (1). Further on, she also claims: "One of the most prolific areas has been the reception of ancient Greece and Rome in modern popular culture, particularly film, and to a lesser extent television" (8). Maurice, as one of the subsequent researchers, points to the value of texts other than literature that should be studied within the reception of antiquity, especially by youngsters. That is why not only literature but also other forms of cultural expression will appear in this work. Moreover, in view of the adaptation phenomenon already mentioned, I would like to include

audio-visual culture, bearing in mind that antiquity is also alive in other cultural texts dedicated to young people, such as games and toys.

It is crucial to understand that examining children's culture within reception studies allows one to decode the intricacies of the modern world on an equal level as it is possible while working on cultural texts dedicated to adults. Maurice (2015) writes:

> Just as the study of children's literature is also a study of the child within society, it is also therefore the study of that society and its culture in a wider sense. [...] Any book that is written for or given to children involves by definition an element of ideology. [...] since that literature is a vital part of Western culture, its study is of importance in understanding that culture. Similarly, Classical Reception Studies argues that the study of the reception of the ancient world, a culture that played such a vital role in the formation of western civilisation and continues to influence society today, provides another tool for understanding western culture. (4)

Certainly, a study of the said works will not bring universal answers to the problems of the world. Classical culture is not present in Asia or Africa as it is in Europe or the United States. Nevertheless, as Sheila Murnaghan and Deborah H. Roberts (2018) claim, "because antiquity's 'immortal fictions and deathless histories' are often understood to transcend local differences, exposure to classical material can be seen as uniting children of various nationalities and classes" (6). This could be achieved with the help of 'modern mythology,'[31] i.e. texts inspired by antique sources and functioning in the space of children's and young adult culture.

The term 'fairy tale' appears only a few times in this book, contextually, as some tropes overlap with both classical mythology and children's literature. Methodological discrepancies could only arise when the terms 'fairy tale' and 'myth' are treated interchangeably. When the static and dynamic motifs of a fairy tale and myth overlap, when a kind of cultural amalgam appears, it is as necessary to point to the fairy tale as it is to prove their mythological character. J.R.R. Tolkien uses the term "Cauldron of Story" or "Pot of Soup," but the researcher must name the ingredients of this "soup" to indicate their convention. It is possible to speak of different schools of description for fairy tales and myths, or stories more broadly (Aleksei Losev 1982, Yeleazar Mieletinsky 1981, Vladimir Propp 2015, Sergej A. Tokarev 1987-1988), but this is not the subject of my research.

Similarly, the distinction between mythical and mythological can carry different connotations and be linked to different cultural traditions. Although I use these terms interchangeably in my work, they can also refer in my research to works that are not reminiscent of classical mythology.

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[31]   As I understand contemporary texts (from the 20th and the 21st centuries) inspired by classical mythology.

For example, J.R.R. Tolkien, the creator of Middle-earth (Lichański, 2003), or Jim Henson, the creator of the Muppet world and also *The Dark Crystal* (1982), whose mythology was expanded in a series produced by Netflix in *The Dark Crystal: Age of Resistance* (2016), could be considered myth-makers. However, such an approach to mythology requires an in-depth study, significantly beyond my area of research. One of the principles I have followed is the selection of exemplifications according to the adopted interpretative perspective and methodology. The choice of examples illustrating certain phenomena is a necessary link in the recognition and does not exclude the presence of counterpoint phenomena and works in relation to those described. My work was not intended to describe all monsters functioning in literature and culture.

Book's Structure

The importance of highlighting monsters in this book – being signs of exclusion in texts for young people – emerges from an article study by Małgorzata Chrobak (2014). The researcher writes: "[...] an integral part of modern human condition is loneliness and an experience of strangeness" (60).[32] Monsters embodying and experiencing loneliness and strangeness have found their place in popular culture that allows all kinds of creatures to exist and speak their truths. They might be even the embodiment of a self-strangeness, as they are often repulsed by their reflection or the idea that others might have about them. They are also suspended between the world of 'normal' and 'not-normal': strange, other, queer. As Caputi (2004) claims:

> [...] the patriarchal era takes hold, femaleness, animality, sexuality, nature, death, and darkness are increasingly seen as something abject, chaotic, "dirty," to be feared and controlled if not eradicated. (317)

Monsters as representatives of minorities should take a permanent place not only in culture but also in academia. Kari Weil (2012) rightly put the fact of the long-term exclusion of minority discourses within humanities, not always warmly welcomed in academia (3–4). As the researcher underlines: "The result was that previously marginalised or silenced groups were no longer to be confined to the status of object but would be subjects of representations; their voices were speaking loudly and demanded to be heard" (4). Animal studies, gender studies, disability, race and ethnicity studies, etc. are relatively new fields of research, not present globally in each university department dealing

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[32] Non-English citations' translations, unless stated otherwise, are provided by the author of this book.

in the humanities or social sciences. Those concepts will be explored in the following chapters.

Despite the clear differences in the particular analyses, the common denominator will remain as follows: a monster as a sign of exclusion is only a cultural costume underneath which hide everything that is not 'normal.' Anna Wieczorkiewicz (2009) claims that: "From the anthropological point of view monsters, freaks and others are a crooked mirror of humanity – they indicate the borders of our condition and the consequences of neglecting its rights" (363). Monsters, particularly those inspired by antiquity, evoke fear but also provoke the question: are they really the scary ones?

Each chapter includes a theoretical frame. The book opens with Chapter I: *Methodology*. recalling a discussion on monstrosity and various approaches to teratology, with emphasis on children's and young adult culture. There, I present my chosen terminology (the distinction between monster, beast, being, etc.) and methodology of research (monster studies, teratology).[33] The growth of the study of monstrosity (Cohen, 1996; Wieczorkiewicz, 2009) will be a reference point for the still-developing field of research on this subject in children's culture (Wróblewska, 2014). My research is based on combining these studies and diagnoses in reception in general and the field of children's culture in particular as well as on a detailed analysis of selected examples.

Subsequent parts of my work focus on particular texts of culture for children and young adults in the light of the new humanities. Chapter II: *The Monstrous Animal* is concerned with 'real' equivalents of mythical beasts known from antiquity (Korhonen, Ruonakoski, 2017). Animality, as one of the constitutive features of monstrosity, is an essential category for my interpretations. Therefore, its analysis appears at the beginning of the work. Researchers of animal studies (Weil, 2012; Haraway, 2008) very frequently acknowledge the category of an animal in the discourse of exclusion. Often treated as monsters, nonhuman creatures find their equivalents in the mythical beasts of youth culture, within which they gain a voice and become allies of the young heroes (Ratelle, 2015). Paradoxically, through their 'fantastic' status, they manifest their postulates on real animals, seemingly unattainable in the real world.

Chapter III deals with monsters in terms of gender studies. Hence, it is titled *The Monstrous Gender* studied in the context of children's and young adult culture (Lasoń-Kochańska, 2012). This chapter is larger than the others, considering the number of examples and complexity of the analysed issue.

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[33] Defining the monster is nearly impossible, as the construct itself is constantly shifting. Nevertheless, the attempt I took served not as the ultimate definition of the said construct, but the application of some theories to the issue I am most concerned with, i.e. monsters being signs of exclusion in texts for young people. Hence, in Chapter II, one aspect of monstrosity is mainly explored, as the construct itself indeed is very complex.

The status of monsters in both myths and retellings of well-known histories would indicate a markedly advanced degree of gender exclusion and related cultural constructs (Butler, 2018). The issue of animalhood, indicated in the previous chapter, as a sometimes constitutive element of monstrosity, finds its application here, for often various characters, whether female or male, are regarded as monsters precisely because of their typically 'animal' features of appearance (Medusa with snakes instead of hair, Minotaur with a bull's head, etc.). Therefore, what would monstrous masculinity mean (Warner, 1994) and how would it differ from monstrous femininity (Caputi, 2004)? Does a monster always have a gender? How do mythical monsters manifest sexuality? I try to answer these and other questions in this section.

The creators of children's culture often use a monster as a figure of exclusion, also due to the disability or illness of a given character. Henceforth, Chapter IV's title is *The Monstrous Disability*. One way of defining monstrosity by Aristotle – the lack or excess of any part of the body – refers directly to various forms of disability or existing illnesses (Wieczorkiewicz, 2009). The metaphors of monstrosity used in antiquity, including the hybridity of many creatures, are reflected in culture for the youngest, often serving readers as a form of literary or film therapy (Fidowicz, 2016). Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the cases of monstrosity separately as a metaphor for illness or disability in order to show the mechanisms of the influence of classical mythology on the problems of the modern world, in which any kind of 'disability' does not necessarily have to be equal to weakness, but to strength. Similarly, the monstrosity comes out of the area of horror and also enters the circles of fascination and uniqueness.

Moving towards successive forms of exclusion, in Chapter V: '*Monsters of Colour*,' I draw attention to mythical beasts as individuals marginalised by ethnicity. Often antique creatures are presented by authors of books and films for children as monsters whose skin colour is not white. Embedded in the history of slavery, discrimination, and the struggle for human rights, 'monsters of colour' almost immediately become signs of exclusion (Thomas, 2018). Monsters are therefore once again understood in a 'double' way: as the reinterpretations of mythical beasts that threaten mankind and as people of different races that pose a civilisational threat to white culture. The subject of race and racism, repeatedly discussed in the studies on culture intended for both adult audiences and children (Nel, 2017), becomes the starting point for reflections on race in works for the young with classical mythology content.

Chapter VI deals with *Monstrous Children*, a construct that somehow brings together two of the most important figures of culture (Bohlmann, Moreland: 2015; Slany, 2014). Monstrosity and childhood turn out to be permeating and – as in other cases of exclusion discussed in the previous chapters – surprisingly complement each other. As all the

examples that have been discussed so far come from children and youth culture, the analysis of the issue requires a return to the subjects raised in the examples and the need to juxtapose them with childhood constructs: boyhood, girlhood, cultural isolation of children in terms of race and disability. Above all, however, I focus on the relationship between the child and the monster, characters who are often equal, whose encounters are a metaphorical breakthrough between what is familiar and what is different. I also use the issues already discussed in numerous studies on children's monsters in order to compare them with examples of classical reception. In this way, I present the resonance of classical mythology with a contemporary young reader and the strategies of authors undertaken in the reconstruction of mythical 'monsters.'

The last chapter, or the ending – *The Monstrous Book – To be Explored* – offers the opening to new perspectives of teratology, proposing further exploration of monstrous themes in children's and young adult culture. Essentially, it is an encouragement to continue reciting the teratological alphabet, to become curious of variations of it, as well as to become accustomed to all monstrous forms and sizes, and to hope that monsters – not only mythological ones – will become a part of our 'normal' world.

I treat the works used in this dissertation selectively, choosing examples – in their entirety or part – inspired by classical mythology and inscribed in its pop culture realisations. The most important texts, among others, would be popular series for children and young adults (J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*, 1997-2007, Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson & the Olympians*, 2005-2009, Lucy Coats' *Beasts of Olympus*, 2015-2018); picture books: *The Sea Tiger* (2014) and *Pandora* (2016) by Victoria Turnbull, *Julian is a Mermaid!* (2018) by Jessica Love; Polish popular literature: *Leo i czerwony automat* [Leo and the Red Machine] by Marcin Szczygielski (2018), *Strachopolis* [Monsteropolis] by Dorota Wieczorek (2015), animations produced by Disney (*Hercules*, dir. Ron Clements, John Musker, 1997); short animations and TV shows (*My Little Pony*, creat. Lauren Faust, 2010-2019; *Gravity Falls*, creat. Alex Hirsch, 2012-2016). I took a closer look not only at books but also films and TV-series, as I believe visual representations also have a significant impact on (not only) young viewers and very often resonate with literary texts, especially in the case of adaptations.[34] Also, cinematic monstrosity, as I show in the first chapter, has influenced popular culture, hence the necessity to include this kind of visual material in the discussion. The analysed works show that what is essential lies far beneath everything that only seems normal.

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[34] As Liz Gloyn (2018) claims: "Cinema offers the perfect place for us to come even nearer to the monster, to see its slavering jaws and shudder at its hybrid transgression, comforted by the sure and certain knowledge that we are only in a movie theatre, and the film will be over soon" (146).

Apart from Anglo-Saxon culture, which is, in a way, an axis of popular culture, examples also include those from Polish children's literature in order to show the examined phenomena on my native ground.[35] Occasionally, I also include contextual texts from other countries (i.e. France), in order to present the scale of a particular phenomenon and variety of motifs in other cultures. I have chosen contemporary texts (understood by me as cultural products of the second half of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries), as they reflect recent changes and transformations of mythical monsters.

This work is not written from the point of view of the classical philology, but rather cultural studies, also consisting of classical motifs. Because I am working on the premise of popular culture, as an ancient context, I use popular mythologies (e.g. Robert Graves, 2011), dictionaries (e.g. Pierre Grimal, 2008) and less often actual classical sources, as I believe many of the texts of popular culture for young people were inspired by the common idea of a myth, not necessarily the exact texts written by the ancients.[36]

My book is a new proposal in the area of monster studies. Even if subjects like gender or childhood have been studied in the context of teratology (even when not named so), they have not been collected within one work concerning the excluded creatures, inlcuding those of our world. Furthermore, even though ancient sources are not vital in my research, and I examine popular ideas of mythical creatures, classical motifs accompany my analysis, serving as a selective tool in the vastness of examples. In the six chapters, I invite you to explore the world of monsters inspired by Greek and Roman mythology, looking for understanding and ways to invite them back to the world of the 21st century.

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[35]   Nonetheless, the subject of my research is the transformation of classical mythology – I do not deal in my dissertation with any other mythologies, be they Slavic or Celtic. Occasionally, I refer to some themes contextually, but recognizing this area would require detailed comparative studies far beyond the subject of the work.

[36]   One of the most important works in the tradition of German antiquity studies is the multi-volume dictionary *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie* (Roscher, orig. 1884-1937; 1992), commonly referred to as „der Roscher." The authors aimed to bring together all versions of Greek and Roman myths, thus reflecting the multifaceted nature of the ancient tradition.
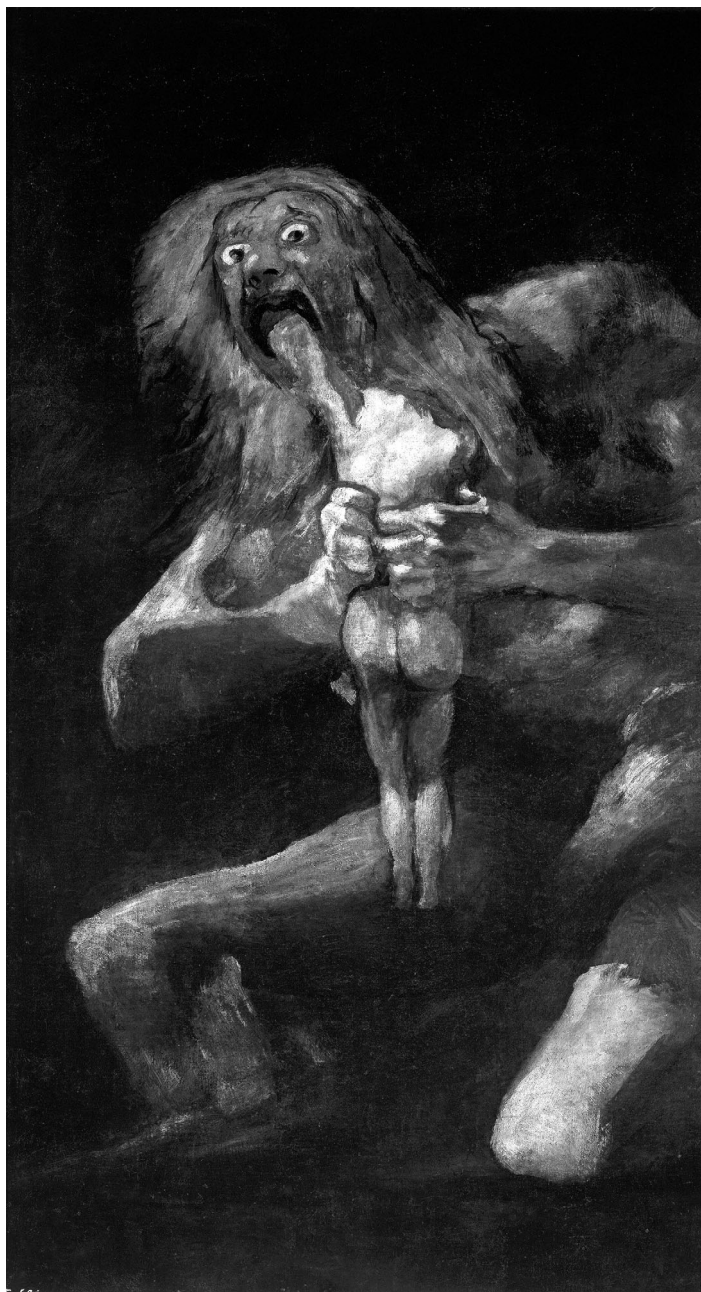
CHAPTER I:
METHODOLOGY

Figure 1. Saturn – one of the first monsters in Greco-Roman mythology

Monsters come in all shapes and sizes. Some of them are things people are scared of.
Some of them are things that look like things people used to be scared of a long time ago.
Sometimes monsters are things people should be scared of, but they aren't.
Neil Gaiman, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, 2013: 112.

What is a Monster?

Myths have the potential to teach us what it means to be human in a very profound and yet universal way (Struck, n.d.). They also tell us what it means not to be one, even though most ancient stories are centred around human or human-like creatures. However, apart from its anthropocentrism (or maybe, because of it), classical mythology is full of monsters that represent common fears and very often something that is not compatible with the general idea of the world and society living in it. In contemporary works for children and young adults, monsters become the victims, helpers, even saviours. They are frequently a manifestation of children's imagination or externalised fears. It would seem as if, in the postmodern world, beasts are no longer a threat but rather a mirror of humanity and intricacies concerning human nature.[37] Although their stories are elaborated, and their motives justified, the idea of a monster in contemporary culture is still often defined simply by perceiving such a being as evil and destructive. As various aspects of the monster are exploited in popular culture, it is crucial to track the history of beasts: cultural constructs (Mittman, 2016: 1) and signs of exclusion, which also had their unique place in classical mythology. This analysis will serve as a platform of references in the study of works coming from the culture of children and young adults that are often inspired not by classical mythology directly but by the general idea of a monster sustained by popular culture.

Monster studies is a fairly popular subject in cultural research. Zombies, ghosts, mummies, vampires, and werewolves, but also 'freaks,' deformed, or genetic mutants, have inhabited popular culture since its very beginning and have transformed throughout the centuries, gaining and losing particular abilities or certain looks, becoming heroes and enemies of humanity (Wieczorkiewicz, 2009: 313; also see Gemra, 2008). As we entered the period commonly known as the postmodern era, after most aspects of culture had been redefined, and almost every story re-told, figures of monsters transformed as well. Djibril al-Ayad (2018) writes that:

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[37]   I elaborated on this matter in the article: *Postmodernistyczne Bestie* [Postmodern Beasts] concerning postmodern retellings of *Beauty and the Beast* (Mik, 2016b), where I claim that: "Nowadays, the Beasts are part of the Beauties' psyche, often bringing to mind their own unconscious sphere they eventually have to face" (128).

> We think of monsters – and we draw them, film them, pass around folded paper at parties and collectively create cadavres exquis. We enjoy the sculptures and paintings of hybrids that our ancestors have been creating for thousands of years. I think more than anything else, it's a theme that we can play with. (vi)

However this playful concept of the monster is easily assembled, the scale of monstrosity is enormously vast: they are not only scary animal-like beasts but also humans behaving as if beyond moral categories, e.g. murderers, rapists, thieves, etc. Liz Gloyn (2018) points out that: "The monster can reshape itself to haunt the culture that is using it, not just the culture that created it" (146). 'Simply scary' in the past, now, as mentioned before, monsters very often function in various texts as **signs of exclusion** (Wieczorkiewicz, 2009: 7), deprived of evil, gifted with backstories. In contemporary culture, also that dedicated to a young audience, horror and fear lie not within the monster's looks or behaviour anymore but within its past, motivation, treatment received from unscrupulous people, whom themselves inherited traits of 'traditional' monsters. Emma Bridges (2018), attempting to answer the question: "What [...] makes a monster?," gives, in my opinion, a proper notion, as "monsters are the product of social conditioning and ideas about what it is to be different from a socially-accepted norm, or responses to deep-rooted psychological fears about the unknown" (3). In terms of exclusion, the figure of a social monster proves to be accurate and works as a metaphor for any minority on multiple occasions.

In my research, the field of studies examining monsters would be referred to as teratology. According to Caroline Joan S. Picart and John Egdar Browning (2012): "The word 'teratology' [gr. *teras* – monster] has multiple meanings, depending on the field or discourse in which it is deployed" (1). While it is used in many disciplines,[38] "literature defines this term as 'a type of mythmaking or storytelling in which monsters and marvels are featured'" (1). Going further, the authors write:

> Teratologies are more than simply a bestiary: a catalogue of "freaks" designed, implicitly, to celebrate the "normal" even as it flirts with a voyeuristic peep at the tabooed. Rather [...] teratologies potentially illustrate how humor, horror, fantasy, and the "real" cross-fertilise each other, resulting in the possibility of new worlds, new ethics, and new narratives coming into being. (1)

Broadly understood, teratology is a tool thanks to which researchers of cultural studies (and not only) can decode the hidden meanings of a monster, a figure consisting of many tropes and signs, not obvious

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[38] Mainly in medicine or what is perceived as pseudo-science.

to see at first glance. Hence, teratology makes it possible to read cultural signs (monsters) and adapt the meanings encoded in them to the context in which they function.

To decode a monster, a cultural sign, it is necessary to examine the etymology of the word: *monster*. However, the sources of the words *potwór* in Polish (sometimes also *monstrum*), and 'monster' in English seem to be different. According to Anna Wieczorkiewicz (2009), the word *monstrare* [Latin: 'to show'] today might allude to not what the monster represents but the way that people, or viewers, react to it (5). For the author of the book *Monstruarium*, it is people who create the concept of the monster. Even if they try to get rid of the creatures they are afraid of, these will always come back, as "their nature intrigues and seduces us" (6). After all, the monster's paradox is in its name's meaning: "The word *monstrum* derives from the Latin *monstrare* [indirectly – AM], meaning: 'to demonstrate,' 'to show,' but also *monere* [directly – AM], which means: 'to warn,' or 'to advise.' [...] The prophetic status allows for the inscription of every wonder into the world's order; then, in between every event that crosses the boundaries of everyday life, 'obvious' relations can be seen" (Wieczorkiewicz, 2009: 14).

That claim, however, might be confronted with that of David J. Skal (2012), who writes:

> The word "monster" in its present English form entered the language around the time of Shakespeare, whose characters find occasion to speak the word more than 80 times. The term descends from the Latin noun monstrum (divine portent) by way of the French verb monere (to warn) while yielding some quaint, discarded variations along the way, such as – a personal favourite – the archaic adjective "monstriferous." (xii)

Even if the etymology of the word *monstrum* is problematic (unsure, to say the least), the essence of its meanings proves to be similar, if not the same, in the various studies. All those theses are confirmed in the text of the pioneer in monster studies, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (1996):

> The monster is born only at this metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment – of a time, a feeling, and a place. The monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy (ataractic or incendiary), giving them life and uncanny independence. **The monstrous body is pure Culture** [emphasis added]. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read: the monstrum is etymologically "That which reveals," "that which warns," a glyph that seeks a hierophant. Like a letter on the page, the monster signifies something other than itself: it is always a displacement, always inhabits the gap between the time of upheaval that created it and the moment into which it is received, to be born again. (4)

What is also vital in examining the phenomenon of monstrosity is the fact that it functions differently in each culture, nation, society, etc., which manifests in language. For example, the Polish *potwór*, according to *Słownik etymologiczny języka polskiego PWN* [The PWN Etymological Dictionary of the Polish Language] is connected with the verb *tworzyć* – 'to create.' The prefix *po-*, meaning 'after' (Długosz-Kurczabowa, 2008), might point to the event that took place after the act of creating the Earth by God. Biblical tradition arising from the source of this Polish word is particularly interesting: in this perspective, Satan, the product of the first rebellion against God, would be a monster *par excellence*, disturbing the divine order, mirroring and subverting the perfect God and his creation. A similar image rises from the classical tradition, as, according to Christopher Dell (2018): "The battle between order and chaos, between good and evil, was made visible through gods and monsters" (7). When analysing mythological monsters, Bartłomiej Grzegorz Sala (2018) took a different approach and, to a certain extent by means of a safety net, explained the origins of the word 'beast,' which in Polish is quite similar and also the same as in Latin: *bestia*:

> The commonly used word "beast" derives from the Latin bestia ["beast"], bestiae and simply means "animal." Hence, bestiaries were works describing various animals, real and fairy tale. Over time, however, the meaning of the word "beast" became popular in many languages and has been narrowed down to a wild and dangerous animal.

> Ultimately, the beast and the monster became terms for untypical creatures – but untypical on different levels. The group of monsters includes an unusual being because of its physicality, as the beast is a being distinguished by bloodthirst regardless of its species affiliation. In practice, however, "monster" and "beast" usually appear as convenient synonyms, hence here too [in the book – AM] there will be no special rigor applied in this matter. (6)

To some extent Sala's definition of the monster coincides with the one offered by *Lexico*, powered by Oxford: 1) "a large, ugly, and frightening imaginary creature"; "An inhuman cruel or wicked person"; "A rude or badly behaved person, typically a child"; 2) "A thing of extraordinary or daunting size"; 3) "A congenitally malformed or mutant animal or plant" (n.d.). However, the phenomenon of the monster is definitely more complicated, and this issue exceeds linguistic complexities. Hence, in the following paragraphs, I will attempt to present different approaches to the monstrosity that are often distanced from their origins, proving that, just like the monster itself, the concept is continually changing.

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What comes up from etymological reflections is a profound statement that was already made but should be highlighted once again: defining the monster, we also define what it means not to be one. Jack Zipes (1994), commenting on Mircea Eliade's works,[39] claims: "Since myth narrates the deeds of supernatural behavior, it sets examples for human beings that enable them to codify and order their lives. By enacting and incorporating myths in their daily lives, humans are able to have a genuine religious experience" (1). In this context, monsters serve as a marker of identification for human beings, who can mirror themselves in depictions of the beasts that go "against the laws of nature" (Dell, 2018: 8). Primarily through myth, a particular form of storytelling, monsters are also an essential part of a human being's development. Wieczorkiewicz (2009) highlights that:

> [...] monsters would like to prove that we need them as if they would like to say that without them we will not define our own nature and we will not understand the world that we want to organise and clarify. (6)

The use of the classical myth in this particular context was justified and described in the Introduction. However, it is also worth noting that, like Dell (2018) claims: "In the pagan world of ancient Greece and Rome, everything had a far more fluid form" (9), including mythical monsters, not so popular, but of course present, in the Judeo-Christian tradition. As the author continues: "[...] the world of Classical mythology offers the most fertile terrain for monsters" (10), later – inspiring the creators of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Being an inseparable part of a person's existence, monster appears in many works of various scholars. Yet, Wieczorkiewicz's ideas will be followed in the further analysis to serve as a theoretical frame eventually to create, or re-create, teratology in children's and young adult literature and film, especially those inspired by classical mythology. By doing so, the concept of a monster as a sign of exclusion will hopefully emerge in the next chapters and point to the particular problems of marginalisation. I will analyse different types of exclusion represented by various monsters, whether alluding to the social minority or the modern world's socio-cultural concepts.

Fantastic Beasts – Fantastic Monsters

As we might have already noticed, the word 'monster' is very rich in meaning. Not only the etymologies and definitions evoke problems, naming someone

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[39]   Zipes (1994) comments on this particular paragraph: "myth tells us how, through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence, be it the whole of reality, the Cosmos, or only a fragment of reality – an island, a species of plant, a particular kind of human behavior, an institution" (1; Eliade, 1963: 5-6).

or something a monster brings new senses to the story too. Moreover, a monster might become a marker of exclusion or a villain in a particular narrative. Setting 'real' scientific books aside for a moment, it is worth stressing that, surprisingly, this vital issue of naming various beasts can be found in J. K. Rowling's *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (see Chapter II). Even though it is a (meta)fictional work, it highlights the same issues presented in the previous part of this chapter, one of them being a question: **what does it mean to name somebody/something a beast?**

In *Fantastic Beasts* (the book), the author plays with the tradition of bestiaries (Mik, 2017, 2021) and introduces the audience to 'wizard–magical creature studies.' Rowling's name does not appear on the cover of the book,[40] and the work is credited under the pseudonym 'Newt Scamander' who, in the *Harry Potter* universe, wrote this textbook – we see it on Harry's supply list for his first year. Although the content of the magical bestiary is fictional (at least at first glance), it is crucial that Rowling "incorporates nonmagical reality into the reality of the plot" and "does not lose sight of the world in which the reader finds themselves" (Schollenberger, 2014: 99). *Fantastic Beasts* from 2001 contains the history of Magizoology[41] and describes 85 magical species from all around the world. Rowling makes the mythical beasts 'ordinary' and at the same time, she creates a fantastic aura around 'normal' animals (Schollenberger, 2014: 99–100). As Justyna Schollenberger notices, "in this case, the animal connects two worlds: magical and normal" (100). The magical bestiary mirrors the current discussion on monstrosity and the phenomenon of othering,[42] also related to children and young adults' culture.

In the introduction to *Fantastic Beasts*, we find theories of Magizoology, which, in many ways, resemble our-world H.A.S. (human–animal studies). According to Schollenberger, here, "Rowling presents in a humorous version the reflections of Aristotle, who tried to determine what in the case of humans is a species difference: what distinguishes them from the rest of animals?" (106). That, however, as I believe, is not a complete question, considering its teratological aspect. We should instead ask: **what distinguishes them from other monsters**?

Peter Dendle (2011) claims that:

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[40] In the first edition (2001). Later editions (2009, 2017) acknowledge Rowling as an author.
[41] In his article, Dendle (2011) uses the term: "cryptozoology" when referring to "the study of unconfirmed species, such as the Loch Ness Monster, Bigfoot, etc." (411), related to the concept explored by Rowling.
[42] In 2020, after I wrote my doctoral dissertation, Magdalena Środa's book *Obcy, inny, wykluczony* [Alien, Other, Excluded] was published, which in many points coincides with the observations in my analysis. However, I did not include the researcher's considerations in my book because it was already a closed whole. Nevertheless, I consider the position of Środa not only valuable, but also extremely necessary considering monstrosity in the context of alienation.

> [...] in the cracks between the known and the unknown lies a blurry region of contested truths. Rowling exploits this liminal region through her inclusion of the paranormal – especially divination and cryptozoology [here, we might also say teratology – AM] – to raise issues of knowledge building in the individual and society. (410)

"The cracks between" might be understood as the intersectional aspects of Rowling's work, representing, through "a blurry region," the reality of the contemporary world's issues. Hybrids, which also inhabit the Wizarding World, are intersectional by definition: at the same time, they are two or more creatures, reflecting different cultural constructs and social superstitions. Maybe that is why they often become a starting point for discussion and pose the question concerning where the line between humanity and monstrosity lies (Shildrick, 2002: 15–17; Oswald, 2010: 23–24).

In his further analysis, Dendle (2011) also stresses that: "[...] there is ongoing fluidity between what is a person, an animal, and a thing – transformations and illustrations are woven into the very fabric of the Wizarding World – and in this environment, the shape of the 'real' appears to be always subject to change" (417). Here, the researcher points towards an essential feature of a monster: fluidity, the ability of constant change, instability, liminality. Considering Rowling's work, such a description of a monster evokes the image of a boggart, a shapeshifting creature lurking in the corners of the Wizarding World, changing into anything that particular wizards or witches are scared of most. Interestingly, boggarts do not appear in Rowling's bestiary, as if their 'fluidity' disabled Scamander to ultimately categorise the creatures, which is also one of the features of a monster.

Going back to the question concerning where the line is between humanity and monstrosity, it is worth stressing that it also concerns researchers from the magical world. According to Newt Scamander, "the definition of a beast has caused controversy for centuries" (Rowling, 2001: x) and wizards are still struggling with the idea of differing 'a being' and 'a beast.' The problem of categorising magical creatures is vividly shown in the introduction to *Fantastic Beasts*:

> Werewolves spend most of their time as humans (whether wizard or Muggle). Once a month, however, they transform into savage, four-legged beasts of murderous intent and no human conscience. The centaurs' habits are not human-like; they live in the wild, refuse clothing, prefer to live apart from wizards and Muggles alike and yet have intelligence equal to theirs. Trolls bear a humanoid appearance, walk upright, may be taught a few simple words and yet are less intelligent than the dullest unicorn and possess no magical powers in their own prodigious and unnatural strength. We now ask ourselves: which of these creatures is a 'being' – that

is to say, a creature worthy of legal rights and voice in the governance of the magical world – and which is a 'beast'? (x)

In this paragraph, Scamander attempts to answer the question: how can we tell whether a being is 'human enough' to be treated like one? The magizoologist underlines that the whole process of deciding whether something should be named 'a beast' or not was "extremely crude" (x). At the beginning of the historical dispute, the criterion was to be a "two-legged" (x–xi) creature, then, to "speak the human tongue" (xi). Nevertheless, at that point, the wizard community had not worked this issue out.

We read that at the beginning of the 19th century, a new definition of 'a being' was introduced. It stated that "any creature that has sufficient intelligence to understand the laws of the magical community and to bear part of the responsibility in shaping these laws" (xii) can be named 'a being.' This criterion, of course, included some creatures in the group of 'beings' by excluding the others. Wizards, similarly to nonmagical people in our world, are still finding it challenging to place nonhuman animals in the artificial hierarchy that helps to define both the places of human and nonhuman animals not only in their magical world but also in the real one. One might be based on the anthropocentric biblical tradition where man is above all other animals and has been accorded domination over them. The other might be related to civil law, different in every country, but still setting boundaries between the human and animal world, already settled in Judeo-Christian tradition (Genesis: 1: 26–28). Nonetheless, the question remains: why does Rowling attempt to settle what is or is not a beast? Scamander seems to have an answer to that too: "to ensure that future generations of witches and wizards enjoy their strange beauty and powers as we have been privileged to do"[43] (Rowling, 2001: xxi).[44]

This statement might appear as unsatisfactory. After a promising introduction seemingly reflecting modern thought on animals, nonhuman animals, and other monsters, Scamander ends his reflection with a very anthropocentric notion of why the magical beasts should be protected. They ought not to live for themselves but for "the future generations" (xxi) to be admired by them. With the preservation manifesto and good intentions comes the utilitarian aspect of saving fantastic beasts for something more than simply themselves. This is very often the case concerning real-life animals, which I attempt to take a closer look at in the next chapter.

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[43] This statement is of course still very anthropocentric.
[44] There is also another issue arising from Rowling's text: naming human and nonhuman animals and the discussion on this issue within animal studies. This, however, will be included in the following chapter concerning monsters being metaphors of animals.

A Desperate Need of a Category

Wieczorkiewicz (2009) writes that looking at a monster might awaken mixed feelings of fear and excitement (11). Monsters are troubling; they make the observer uneasy, uncomfortable, unsafe. However, the disturbances of order embodied in a monster can be contained if one constructs some kind of classification. This order helps the observer to understand the distortion they associate with the monster (11). If such observers do not have tools to decode an object that they commune with, they have to create one: categories that describe something eluding previously known rules. This phenomenon brings up the concept of bestiaries (mentioned above) that included various creatures (real and fantastic) to be sorted, trapped in a literary cage, and subjected to human power.

Traditionally, sometimes depending on the time and cultural context, among many possible categories defining a monster, would be: excess (for example too many hands), deficiency[45] (only one hand) or duplication (two heads; Wieczorkiewicz, 2009: 11). The norm in the case of such categorisation, considering the context of Western pop culture, would be a White adult human, most likely male, of European origin, heterosexual, and Christian. However, those categories are not constant and determined once and for all: due to the cultural changes and the perspective of the observer one creature might be simultaneously marvellous and monstrous, beautiful and hideous (12).

This incoherency and lack of definitive categorisations cause general disturbance from the perspective of a non-monster creature. As Jeffrey J. Cohen (1996) claims:

> This refusal to participate in the classificatory "order of things" is true of monsters generally: they are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threaten to smash distinctions. (6)

Monsters, as cultural constructs, very often fracture ideas about what ought or ought not to exist, what should be excluded, thrown away.[46] They prefer to be identified as intersectional characters, not definite, open to multiple possibilities. As Cohen continues:

> Through the body of the monster fantasies of aggression, domination, and inversion are allowed safe expression in a clearly delimited and permanently liminal space. Escapist delight gives way to horror only when the monster threatens to overstep these boundaries, to destroy

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[45]   As we read in Aristotle's *Generation of Animals* (Peck, 1990), Book IV: "[...] monstrosity is really a sort of deformity" (419).

[46]   Which might recall Julia Kristeva's idea of 'abjection' (1982).

or deconstruct the thin walls of category and culture. When contained by geographic, generic, or epistemic marginalization, the monster can function as an alter ego, as an alluring projection of (an Other) self. (17)

As the examples presented in the following chapters will show, **monsters want to be free;** they do not need a category to contain them. This is a desperate need, sometimes aggressively manifested by 'normal' humans, projecting themselves on monsters, not ready to face their, as Cohen writes, "Other selves." As Elaine L. Graham (2002) reminds us:

> One of the ways in particular in which the boundaries between humans and almost-humans have been asserted is through the discourse of 'monstrosity'. Monsters serve both to mark the fault-lines but also, subversively, to signal the fragility of such boundaries. They are truly 'monstrous' – as in things shown and displayed – in their simultaneous demonstration and destabilization of the demarcations by which cultures have separated nature from artifice, human from nonhuman, normal from pathological. Teratology, the study of monsters, bears witness to this enduring tradition of enquiry into the genesis and significance of the aw(e)ful prospect of human integrity transgressed. Significantly, teratology also straddled what we would think of as the disciplinary lines of religion and science, being simultaneously a theological and early scientific form of discourse [...]. (12)

To analyse cultural monsters, it is essential to start with looking at categories first, and maybe afterwards examine the intersectional potential of those constructs. Hence, the theoretical dominance of teratology over intersectionality takes place in my work, at the same time, leaving it open to further research on monsters.

As Katarzyna Slany (2017a) comments on Cohen's monster theory:

> [it] appears to be useful in examining texts which treat the motif of monstrum intertextually and paradoxically, with the special case of the monster figure being involved in the gender, queer or identity discourses, or as a figure embodying socially repressed human needs. (11)

Sexuality and gender, as something defined not only by biology but also, even more so, by culture (Butler, 2008; Phillips, 2010), has to be included in any discussion about monstrosity, as the monster is a product of culture as well. Thus, the final definition of a monster seems to be not so far out of reach after all: a **monster is a cultural costume,** camouflage, cloak, under which hides a being that tries to escape any categorisation, desired by the people of governmental power over another being. What is more, the understanding of a monster differs according to the cultural, historical and geographical context, hence the different sources and traditions of monstrosity. In this book, I will most frequently allude to Greek and Roman mythology, thus the necessity to recall the understanding of a monster in antiquity.

Mythological Monsters in Popular Culture

As Liz Gloyn (2018) points out: "Ancient monsters survive because they are supremely adaptable. Rather than coming tied to the fears of the ancient Greeks and Romans which generated them, they have found ways to come through the shadows of the modern world" (149). At first glance, in antiquity, monsters had a different status. As Aristotle claimed in Book IV of *Generation of Animals* (Peck, 1990), monsters were those creatures that did not resemble their parents (3, 769b 4–10; Sowa, 2016: 6; Wieczorkiewicz, 2009: 16; 21). For the philosopher, the concept of monstrosity was strictly connected to the concept of animality. Discussing various monster concepts (either it was because of the lack of semen or wrong position of a woman's womb), he claimed:

> People say that the offspring which is formed has the head of a ram or an ox; and similarly with other creatures, that one has the head of another, e.g., a calf has a child's head or a sheep an ox's head. The occurrence of all these things is due to the causes I have named; at the same time, in no case are they what they are alleged to be, but resemblances only, and this of course comes about even when there is no deformation involved. (416–419)

Aristotle's 'partial' way of thinking about monsters[47] is also reflected in modern thought concerning teratology. Not only does it appear in the recently cited work by Wieczorkiewicz, but also Cohen (1996) claims that:

> Monsters are never created ex nihilo, but through a process of fragmentation and recombination in which elements are extracted "from various forms" (including – indeed, especially – marginalized social groups) and then assembled as the monster which can then claim an independent identity. (11)

After all, it is not important what part of an animal has been attached to a human body – or vice versa, but what this part represents. If we consider the monster to be a cultural manifestation, its parts might be related to various cultural and social motifs, movements, phenomena, etc. Aristotle in *Generation of Animals* also reflected on monsters having multiple organs ("some monsters have two spleens or more than two kidneys"), etc. However, probably his most vital remark was made according to Nature as an infallible creative power that does not make mistakes:

> A monstrosity, of course, belongs to the class of "things contrary to Nature," although it is contrary not to Nature in her entirety but only to Nature in the generality of cases. So far as concerns the Nature

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[47]   Also related to his other work *Parts of Animals*.

which is always and is by necessity, nothing occurs contrary to that; no; unnatural occurrences are found only among those things which occur as they do in the generality of cases, but which may occur otherwise. Why, even in those instances of the phenomena we are considering, what occurs is contrary to this particular order, certainly, but it never happens in a merely random fashion; and therefore it seems less of a monstrosity because even that which is contrary to Nature is, in a way, in accordance with Nature [...]. Hence, people do not call things of this sort monstrosities any more than they do in the other cases where something occurs habitually [...]. (ed. 1990: 425–427)

Aristotle's biological, or rather traditionally teratological, approach to monstrosity as to a form of distortion at some level represents the model of the world's hierarchy where monsters have their place, as Nature's "failed projects" (failed – from human's perspective) but not 'useless' ones that have no particular purpose. Nature cannot be wrong and it do not create something by mistake. Moreover, if it is a mistake, it is meant to be made and undoubtedly has its place among human and nonhuman animals. From such a perspective, antiquity seems a more friendly environment for any form of Otherness than the world today.

Nevertheless, most of the popular depictions of mythological monsters, whether inspired by 'original' texts or not, are confronted by the popular notions of monstrosity, often presented in mythological compendiums, textbooks, or dictionaries, which vary in each country. For example, considering the Polish context, in the entry *Potwory* [Monsters] in *Słownik mitów i tradycji kultury* [Dictionary of Myths and Cultural Traditions] Władysław Kopaliński (1985) writes:

The Greeks liked to fill their myths with figures of various monsters, fantastic beings, often dangerous, whose monstrosity, contrasting with the harmony of the human body and the cosmic order of the world of the Olympian gods, symbolised the barbarity, cruelty, and chaos of the world of the gods that had been already conquered. (917)

According to the scholar, monsters of the classical world were predominantly one-dimensional and had a simple task: to induce fear and warn against doom. Similarly, Lidia Urbańczyk and Olaf Pajączkowski (2015), examining the monster in children's fantasy literature, claim: "A monster by its very nature is an evil creature; the deformation of its body is reflected in its nature, in its hostile attitude towards man" (350). That, however, seems not to be entirely true. Monsters from Greek and Roman mythology could be perceived as misunderstood or simply miserable, as they had their own rich stories and complex motivations[48].

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48   This will be discussed more fully in the following chapters.

Bartłomiej Grzegorz Sala (2018) also seems to appreciate the great cultural value of mythological creatures:

> In a world rich in religious beliefs, world-views, and ancient Greek myths, what is particularly striking is the vast majority of different monsters gifted with a preternatural look, abilities and individual character. It might be claimed that in creating all sorts of beasts, the inhabitants of the Ancient Hellenic fantasy, were second to none. But, just as importantly, many astonishing creatures from ancient Greek imagery have lived for twenty centuries in the symbolic world of Europeans – and not only of Europeans – and some live there to this day. This proves the creative minds of the Hellenes, capable of creating such extraordinary beings that innumerable generations have not managed to resist the power of their influence. Original monsters and beasts seem to be one of the strongest aspects of Greek mythology that has captured the collective imagination of whole generations and continues to fascinate to this day. (6)

Alluding to Sala's thought, the modern concept of monstrosity seems not so different from the one emerging from Greek and Roman mythology. Similarly, the same would be claimed if we compare the *Lexico* categorisations with the one developed by Kopaliński (1985), who divides mythological monsters into the following groups:

> 1. Human beings of non-natural proportions, see Giants.
> 2. Human beings with unusual structural features, such as an excessive or insufficient number of limbs and other organs, see Argus; Cyclops; Geryon; Gorgons; Gray; Hecatonchers; Medusa.
> 3. Beings combining human and animal shapes, see Centaur(s), Echidna, Erechteus (Erichtonios); Giants; Harpies; Kekrops; Minos (Minotaur); Satires; Scylla and Charybdis; Sphinx; Sirens; Triton; Tiphon (Tipheus).
> 4. Beings combining the shape of two or more animals, see Cerber, Chimera; Griffin; Hippogriff; Hippalektrion; Hippokampos; Python; Dragon. (917)[49]

These categories might appear troubling, as they do not seem to reflect the mythological world accurately. They overlap, cross over, intersect. Cyclops can be perceived as disabled "human beings of non-natural proportions," The Minotaur can be qualified as "a human being with unusual structural features." Although they were created that way and were immortal, they are cast-off versions of real-life people from the 'human' point of view. I would like to look at mythological creatures from different angles, not definite, hence the 'body type' of a monster, although acknowledged on several occasions, will not be the primary concern in my analysis.

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[49]   Sala (2018) refers to the same concept and suggests adding a fifth group: 'common' animals of enormous size or 'special' power (6).

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Now, I would like to present a different approach to teratological studies that does not acknowledge the heritage of antiquity to such a large extent, but rather seek the origins of monstrosity in the dark sphere of popular culture. It is a trend of the second half of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century to analyse monsters within the horror and Gothic tradition (Aylesworth, 1986; Vigueras, Nielsen, 2008). According to Noël Carroll, recalled by Urbańczyk and Pajączkowski (2015), monsters in horror stories have to be scary as a constitutive element of this genre (354). Within the axiology of horror stories:

> The monster is a representative of the supernatural, fantastic world [...]. The monster always reveals itself, directly evokes a sense of the uncanny and becomes an adversary of Evil; it threatens not only physically, but also metaphysically. Its existence, breaking all laws of nature, can be a threat to the fragile psyche of the hero. It is a borderline creation (that which is human and that which is not human), which as a "gap" in rationality and remains a negatively valued creation. (354)

Nevertheless, horror stories were not the primary field of the monster's origins, as 'scary creatures' appear in many cultural areas. The variety of monster's functions, roles, symbols reflect the historical path of its development. Summarising her reflections in *Monstruarium*, Wieczorkiewicz (2009) concludes that: "[...] culture is permeated by the thought of monstrosity" and "the present day, which is a destination point for us, appears as one of many epochs in the history of monstrosity" (258). Even if today's monsters were inspired by antiquity, it has to be considered that creatures of popular culture are products of years, or even ages, of development and various transformations. Popular culture itself, as Marcel Danesi (2015) claims, "is not tied to any particular folk or artistic traditions" (3). Especially in the postmodern era, a 'pure' cultural concept of any kind has no chance of coming into being. Nevertheless, this mechanism of identifying a cultural phenomenon works both ways: werewolves, vampires, zombies, ultimately – aliens and cyborgs – all could be analysed in the context of classical antiquity, although probably in different ways. Therefore, with the numerous cultural hybrids, comes numerous possibilities of deconstructions and interpretations. As Picart and Browning (2012) claim: "[...] monstrosity is always already global, constructed from within a culture against the backdrop of a broader historical sketch, a product of an organized society's attempt to classify what it deems 'normal' or 'monstrous'" (2). Monsters are global and travel worldwide on the back of popular culture.

An attempt at diagnosing the phenomenon of categorising what is or is not 'normal' can be found in the early 19th-century book *Frankenstein:*

The Modern Prometheus by Mary Shelley (1818; Marciniak, 2020: 36; also see Gemra, 2008: 249–320). Dr Frankenstein's monster would probably be one of the most iconic monsters still existing in popular culture. Having the subtitle: *The Modern Prometheus*, it already proves its receptive potential. This notion, however, is not the most relevant one in this context. As Stephen Bann (1994) writes: "*Frankenstein* is not simply about creation and monstrosity; it is also about the representation of the monster, and his creator" (2). Shelley's monster also proves to be a timeless and universal construct:

> [...] we could say that the 'image' of the monster that appears, first of all, in the popular dramatic productions of the 19th century and acquires definitive form, for the 20th century, in the person of Boris Karloff, is integrally linked to our concept of the man/machine relationship in the age of automation: only very recently has the 'robot' begun to lose its anthropomorphic characteristics, and its mythic links with the transgressive notion of creating life. (2)

Frankenstein has an inscribed myth of creation – the monster has been constructed by Dr Frankenstein, put together out of the pieces of his imagination. The same process has been made throughout the ages in people's minds, through tales and gossips, through warnings and curses. Above all, Frankenstein's monster is a symbol of exclusion that has not changed in later movie adaptations and the story's re-workings.[50] What is also important,

> Frankenstein both longs for the fulfilment of his scientific ambitions and recoils from the being who results, caught in the paradox of fearing and never being able to escape his creation. Similarly, classical monsters draw us in at the same time as they repel us; we read ancient myths wanting to encounter these beasts up close, but not too close. (Gloyn, 2018: 146)

There are many Frankenstein monsters to be found in modern culture. Such an idea of a monster created by a human and automatically treated as a separate form of being can be found in numerous texts pertaining to a given culture, and include the creation of the concept of cyborgs in the 20th century. Roy Batty from *Blade Runner* (dir. Scott, 1982), the T800 from *The Terminator* (dir. Cameron, 1984), even the cartoon protagonist of *Inspector Gadget* (animated series, 1983-1986, various creators) could be interpreted in the context of Frankenstein's monster story. Also, the first half of the 21st century productions, such as *Westworld* (TV-series, 2016-, various creators) could be connected to the phenomenon of the

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[50]   One of the examples would be the episode of *The X-Files*: *The Post-Modern Prometheus* (S05E05, dir. Carter, 1997), which was not only related to Shelley's work, but also its movie adaptation: *Frankenstein* (dir. Whale, 1931).

monster's creation. This TV-series is based on the concept of creating artificial universes for people's amusement – an 'upgraded LARP' one might say. In those worlds, cyborgs, looking and behaving like real people, are created by artificially generated human parts and gain self-consciousness and free will. Such examples show the myth's longevity from the 19th century and reflect the possible complexity of a monster of the 21st century.

The example of Frankenstein's creation to a certain extent reflects the process of the monster's cultural birth. This concept of an excluded monster was followed by numerous texts (cf. Marcela, 2015): from *Dracula* (1897) by Bram Stocker with its tragic vampire figure; *Elephant Man* (1980), a movie about Joseph Merrick, a deformed man, a 'freak' and a social outcast, to *Shrek* (2001) with the green ogre saving the princess and disrupting the status quo of the fairy-tale kingdom; and the Oscar-winning movie *The Shape of Water* (2017) by Guillermo del Toro, a love story between a mute girl and a sea creature, both excluded from society. Popular culture is filled with monsters, and it would be a real challenge to gather and analyse them within one publication. As was stated above, monsters are the results of long, sometimes very complicated, processes of crystallising people's ideas about 'abnormal creatures,' and those coming from mainstream works are not an exception.

However, the essential conclusion concerning the general concept of the pop-cultural monster would be: "A monster is not only an allegory of fear of external threats but also a sign of anxiety about the internal cohesion of man" (Urbańczyk, Pajączkowski, 2015: 355). Monsters disturb, raise anxiety, and destroy man's unified image, often to expose his weaknesses and fears. However, by fracturing the human perception of the world and the notion of normality, they make it possible to rebuild this image. The monster is no longer 'the other' but 'one of us,' a part of our society. It will not be a rupture or a deviation, but with its diversity, the world of 'normal' people will be enriched.

Monsters of the Children's World

"[Monsters] move human minds, they make us look for causes, consider ideas that seem to be undebatable, they stimulate the creation of stories and pictures" (Wieczorkiewicz, 2009: 7). There is no one kind of monstrosity; those concepts – just like myths – always transform, according to the currents needs of a particular society. In this book, I will not discuss how monsters can delight us, awaken existential doubts or cause esthetical discomfort, which are also a part of teratology (7). I will focus on those aspects of a monstrosity that highlight the marginalisation of characters appearing in works for young people. Recalling previous postulates coming

from reception studies researchers, it is worth underlining that: "The way society perceives monstrosity, where it sees it, and what kind of attitudes it promotes towards it, is a practical touchstone of the officially recognized **moral sensibility**" (9; emphasis added). The moral aspect of the mythical stories re-told for children might appear as crucial and monsters, signs of exclusion might carry great potential to form young generations, which covers Marciniak's postulates, recalled in the Introduction.

The problem of a lack of real meaning in modern monsters known to children was raised by Violetta Wróblewska (2014). In the summary of her book, *Od potworów do znaków pustych. Ludowe demony w polskiej literaturze dla dzeci* ["From Monsters to Empty Signs: Folk Demons in Polish Literature for Children"], she claims that: "Commercialized demons in contemporary form ought to, above all, make the readers laugh, less so teach or scare (...)" (235). Further, we also read that fairy tale monsters are either trivialized or brutalized, and "there is rather little meaning behind it" (238). Certainly, most monsters have lost their religious value (except perhaps the biblical Satan). However, I am far from claiming that there is not much meaning behind them. In her book, Wróblewska also writes, in the context of folktales, that "The world of monsters is gone forever" (244). But what are real monsters? What are real folk tales? The ones that have been heard, recorded, written down, distributed? It is difficult to track back the 'original' monster or the 'original' folk tale. That is why I took a different approach in my work. I assumed that monsters are among us, here and now, even if they do not resemble their former (original?) versions so much. I searched for their image in the common imagination, not always in primary or secondary sources, which are often as misleading as 'non-scientific' bestiaries.

For Wróblewska, contemporary monsters are 'empty figures,' not meaningful characters. From my perspective, it is not always the case. Yes, their image has been transformed over the ages, but they carry, a different, yet no less important message, to people they encounter. Of course, Wróblewska's (to some extend accurate) claim is based on the study of folk tales and legends that, however, do not seem to be so different from literature based on classical mythology. Proof of that is provided by Wróblewska herself, as she quotes from the text by Włodzimierz Bolecki whose title (*Od potworów do znaków pustych*) in a way inspired her own discoveries:

> The basic part of the grotesque, that is, the image of a creature consisting of human and animal parts already appeared in 3000 BC in the art of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and India. 2000 years later it became a distinctive element of Chinese art and Greek mythology, where it obtained many proper names: Minotaur, Midas, Daphne, Acteon, Gorgon-Medusa, Harpy, etc. [...] Hybrids such as animals with human parts (for example

the Sphinx), or as people with animal parts (for example Minotaur, Midas), or as a combination of parts taken from different animals (for example Pegasus) appeared in the ancient world. [...] Traits of the mythical grotesque (that is: Egyptian-Graeco-Roman) coexisted both among people and hybrids, and very often were the subject of admiration and cult (for example fauns, goddesses, gods, etc.). (Bolecki, 1998: 115–116 in: Wróblewska, 2014: 236)[51]

It is not said how Bolecki (1989) decided which creature was more of a human, and which was more of an animal. His way of thinking provokes some doubts. According to his classification: is the Minotaur superior to the Sphinx? Which of these creatures are more human? Does humanity in a given monster count according to a certain percentage? If we assume that intelligence is a distinctive human characteristic, presumably being 'wiser' than an animal, the Sphinx, with its human head and fondness for uttering complicated riddles, should be presented here as being superior to the Minotaur which has a bull's head and is driven by unstoppable, truly animalistic rage. Another doubt comes after reading Bolecki's statement that supposedly people coexisted with hybrids, not acknowledging the division between sacrum and profanum, and how hybrids very often threatened humans and were not admired at all. As for the given examples, was a god a hybrid to Bolecki?

Based on those claims, it is hard to sustain Wróblewska's thesis that monsters do not scare us anymore. There are indeed some unquestionable examples of children's and young adult literature and films that present tamed monsters, with, metaphorically speaking, claws painted pink and teeth in braces.[52] However, what needs highlighting is the fact that the 'scary' part of any monster-like story, whether it is a fairy tale or a Greek myth, is still there, although may be less concentrated on the evil character, but more on a specific state that the character has found itself in (for example anxiety, depression, loss, etc.). In this situation, a monster becomes the symbol of something other than untamed liminal energy or a representative of human fears. Examples of such cases might vary depending on the topic, age of the presumed recipients, country of origin, etc. As stated above, in my book, I will examine those creatures representing different forms of social exclusion.

Unlike Wróblewska (2014), I do not claim that after the long process of adapting, monsters have lost their "mythological depth" (237)[53]. As,

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[51] In his study Bolecki analyses (briefly) monsters as manifestations of the grotesque, which is the main topic of the article.
[52] Just to mention the web-series: *Monster High* (creat. Audu Paden, 2010-2015), followed by: *Monster High: The Adventures of the Ghoul Squad* (2017-2018), where students are teenage monsters, descendants of the famous Cleopatra, Medusa, werewolves, zombies, etc.
[53] In the context of fantasy literature and the degradation of myth, see Trocha, 2009.

hopefully, the following examples will show, in some cases mythical beasts have reclaimed their origins, have told the story in a way that they wanted it to be told. In contemporary literature and film for young audiences, they have also become the voice of the voiceless, that is animals, women, children, the sick or disabled, people of colour, or queers, so every unit that in one way or another has been excluded from heteronormative, predominantly 'White' and 'male' Christian society. The following chapters will provide material to support this thesis.

<div align="center">*</div>

Children's culture plays an enormous role in introducing a monster into popular culture, often profusely using its tradition. Anna Martuszewska, recalled by Ubrańczyk and Pajączkowski (2015), states:

> [...] the almost eternal existence of [....] allegories led to the "taming" of monsters. With their tails, claws, wings, etc., they seem today somehow strangely not dangerous, and sometimes even funny [...]. We have got used to them from childhood, listening to fairy tales, watching bedtime T.V., reading books addressed to the youngest readers, visiting amusement parks, meeting at almost every step their iconic ideas. (355)

Similarly, Katarzyna Slany (2016) claims that: "we have been used to the demonic figure of the monster since early childhood, as it acts as a 'guardian' of the norms that adults used to impose on children" (24). The amusement parks mentioned by Martuszewska would be a great example of this phenomenon. Although haunted houses or scare paths are supposed to arouse fear in people attending such events, the aim is general amusement, i.e. fear fun. This phrase, bearing a trace of an oxymoronic meaning, suits the general idea about monsters:

> Monstrosity generates an extraordinary interweaving of conflicting emotions: fear or horror, abhorrence and cognitive loss are inseparably intertwined with curiosity, amazement, fascination, pity. Terror and disgust, curiosity and delight – monsters evoke an extraordinary weave of fear, but also admiration. The register of feelings aroused by the monster expands in the works of the underage audience. (Urbańczyk, Pajączkowski, 2015: 355)

As we will see in the following chapters, young characters from works for children often do not fear the monster: they are more curious and fascinated by the 'abnormality,' contrasting it with their parents' lessons and ideas: what should or should not be, etc. Monsters do not scare, so what do they do instead?

Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* (originally published in 1963) might be perceived as a story about the essence of monstrosity.

A boy named Max whose mother disapproves of his wild, nonhuman behaviour, travels to an island and meets monsters "who are oversized, shaggy haired, with sharp pointy teeth. Frequently, the monsters claim that they are going to eat Max up, but Max is never eaten up, nor does he appear frightened by his new friends" (Ormandy, 2017: 68).[54] Those monsters "were inspired by his unruly, and sometimes bossy, relatives that would visit his childhood home for Sunday dinners" (68). Interestingly, in *Where the Wild Things Are* fantastic beasts are not called 'monsters' even once – just "wild things." That is what Max is called by his mother (Sendak, 2000: 7), and then later – by the Wild Things (monsters) themselves: "the most wild things of all" (22). The figure of a monstrous child bonding with other wild beasts will come back as a topic in my analysis.

Ormandy (2017) claims that:

> they are quite different than traditional monsters. These "monsters" have sharp pointy teeth, appear to have no manners, and are desperate for a "wild rumpus." While living with the monsters, Max quickly makes fast friends who look very different than him. Despite their seemingly fun relationship, Max's monsters frequently tell him that they are going to eat him up because they love him so – yet they never do. (68–69)

Monstrosity in Sendak's picture book is a category that comprises all the characters: the child and wild things, but also space (Max's room becomes a forest) which in a way goes wild. There is no scary monster, no antagonist waiting round the corner to devour its victim. To be a monster for Sendak means to be free, to love and be loved (Ormandy, 2017: 69).[55]

Thirty eight years after *Where the Wild Things Are* came out, Pixar Animation Studios and Walt Disney Pictures released a buddy comedy animation *Monster, Inc.* (dir. Docter, 2001). Furthermore, even though the possibility of direct inspiration for Sendak's work is relatively low in this case, there are striking similarities between these two works. In the animation, two monster friends, Sulley and Mike, work in a company whose main task is to obtain energy from children's screams. To achieve that every day professional scarers go through doors to children's bedrooms and try to gain as much 'scream' as they can.[56] There is, however, a catch since monsters believe in children's toxic properties and deadly abilities. In this world, the concept of a monster is clearly based on fear of the other species and false belief based on unjustified

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[54] In this case, we are dealing with yet another category of monstrosity – cannibalism (Braham, 2016, 22). I have not used this category as an overarching one in my work, but its use would undoubtly offer many new interpretative possibilities.

[55] Marciniak sees a similarity between Sendak's monsters and the Minotaur (2020: 34–35). However, Selma G. Lanes (2013) notes they were inspired by his "Jewish relatives," *King Kong*, and horses from his previous story (88).

[56] Ultimately they become traditional 'monsters from the closets.'

assumptions. The relationship between Sully and his 'child to scare' that he names Boo proves that the 'monster' is an artificial construct that can be easily decomposed as both characters become best friends. The 'real monster,' the boss of Monster Inc. planning to kidnap children, does not end well not because of his origins, but because of his actions. A similar tendency can be noticed in multiple English picturebooks, e.g. in *Billy Monster's Daymare* by Alan Durant and Ross Collins (2007). The main character, a little monster, is scared of human children attacking him, just like human children being afraid of monsters. Such works explicitly show how a monster is just a construct and can be applied to any creature. Looks or species are just different costumes. The unstable nature of a monster is also reflected in *When a Monster Is Born* by Sean Taylor and Nick Sharratt (2006). In this picture book, for each monster action/metamorphosis/circumstance there are two possible scenarios of an upcoming event, which can be of a positive or negative nature. The monster can scare you, or help you, can be ugly or pretty, naughty or polite. Another example is the author's large-format book *Dans La Peau Des Monstres* [In Monsters' Skin] by Guillaume Duprat (2019), published in the convention of a contemporary bestiary. The monsters are shown in a stereotypical 'scary' manner, however, their eyes/snouts are covered by an opening paper 'wing.' When we look under the coverage, we can see the real faces of the monsters, their dreams and fears, contradicting popular notions (e.g., Cerberus dreams of being free, King Kong is afraid of being hurt by people). The monster's dual nature reflects the dual nature of a child or human in general. For a growing child that might be one of the most important factors of cultural monstrosity.

Famous monsters living on Sesame Street (creat. Cooney, Morrisett, Henson 1969-) to this day would be yet another example of monster-children co-existence. Big Bird, Cookie Monster, Rosita or even Elmo, maybe thanks to their Muppet origins developed by Jim Henson in 1969, lost their (traditional) 'monster' characteristics and gained the opinion of the funny and friendly, fluffy, colourful creatures helping children to understand the world surrounding them. Those monsters do not scare children. Instead of being odd and unusual, they embody the intricacies of the reality seen from a child's perspective. As a TV-series, *Sesame Street* has been a huge worldwide success since 1970. Still, it amuses children eager to meet their well-known friends, introducing new characters such as Abby Cadabby, who has two homes since her parents got divorced, or a H.I.V. positive Muppet Kami.[57] Due to the change of television and viewer expectations towards educational programs and the new love for healthy food and having a cookie only once in a while, even the Cookie Monster had to go on a diet. The Sesame Street universe expands and

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[57]   In an episode aired in a South American and Nigerian co-production of the show.

introduces new forms of 'monstrosity' that can be looked at in an entirely positive way.

Mirja Quix (2016) writes: "Literature for children is a field of literary studies which is versatile – yet this diversity is one of the reasons precise delimitations are controversial." (2) Just as in the case of adapting mythology for a younger audience and eliminating 'inappropriate' elements of classical mythology, very often children's culture is, in a way, 'distilled,' deprived of elements of horror or sexuality, perceived as not very 'children friendly' topics. However, monsters, even if connected to horror and sexuality, played an important role in folklore and 19th-century education and were part of the didactic strategy system. As Katarzyna Slany (2016) claims, monsters generated from those traditions were used to "force the youngest to maintain a specific 'corset' of social behaviour" (24). From its beginnings, the monster was to scare, was a tool in the hands of grown-ups to prevent children from undesirable behaviour (25). Nevertheless, children had their ways to concur hideous beasts, due to their equal fascination with the macabre and grotesque (25). As it often turns out, the ones who are really scared of monsters are grown-ups, not children.

Monsters are vividly present in culture, and there is no denying that and no need to avoid the topic with youngsters. Hence numerous works have been published in recent years, just to mention a collection of essays by Leslie Ormandy (2017) regarding picture books or a book by Markus P. J. Bohlmann and Sean Moreland (2015) on horror movies. Those, however, are not concerned with monsters in children's literature in a direct way. Like the books mentioned earlier, most of those articles are about monsters in children's culture concerning horror and/or Gothic aesthetics, somehow implying that traditionally monsters are strictly connected with arousing or embodying fear and playing the role of antagonists. However, according to Slany (2016), "[m]onstrosity understood in the fantasy of horror as an archetypical evil or symbol of cultural, planetary or ecological threats does not correspond to the creations of a monster in literature for the youngest" (24). Apart from multiple articles and book chapters, no major work has been written on the widely understood concept of monstrosity in culture for young people. Thus, selected articles will serve here to create a reference field for the main topic, which is mythological monsters in children's and young adult culture.

The concept of horror in children's stories is also very often connected to the comic, which the title of Lidia Urbańczyk's and Olaf Pajączkowski's (2015) article suggests: *Między grozą a komizmem. Potwór bohaterem opowieści dla dzieci* [Between Horror and the Comic: The Monster as a Protagonist of Stories for Children]. According to their definition: "The monster, a representative of the supernatural world, is materialised

and extraordinary, and appears suddenly. Because of this nothing will be the same as before" (349). Apart from evoking fear, which the authors in reference to the fairy-tale tradition, the monster in children's literature can also be a faithful friend, a helper in taming anxieties, since it often causes laughter instead of dismay (350).

The numerous functions of a monster listed by Urbańczyk and Pajączkowski overlap with the genres the unusual creatures appear in. A fairy tale would be full of monsters embodying people's fears and sexual needs (Warner, 1998): they are allegories of various problems and anxieties, and, according to scholars, make stories more attractive. That changes in fantasy literature:

> In fantasy works, the beasts' uncanny appearance, immediately distinguishing them from other creatures, marks them as abominations and beings disturbing the natural balance, coming from the evil deities. These creatures retain their mythological status of obstacles, trials or worthy opponents; they are usually the personification of Evil, their existence threatens the livelihood of natural creatures (servants of good deities), somehow entitled to life. Some monsters may be grotesque, but they may have noble hearts and help the main characters. (Urbańczyk, Pajączkowski, 2015: 352)

Following the authors' thought, we might divide monsters of children's fantasy into two basic groups: 'good' monsters and 'bad' monsters in reference to fairy-tale axiology. According to the tradition presented by Urbańczyk and Pajączkowski and previously by Kopaliński, some may still play the role of antagonists, just like their mythological ancestors. In this context, the 'good' monster would be a relatively new convention, developed in children's culture and the requirements within its structures. However, that will be an issue raised in the following chapters of this book: were monsters in the past evil or is it instead a general notion derived from popular culture? Is 'good' and 'bad' the only differentiation as far as monsters are concerned?

Later in the article, Urbańczyk and Pajączkowski offer a different division of the monster: of terror – anticipated and not embodied, not a concrete creature; and of horror – a concrete monster, causing a realistic threat (356). However, that division brings a risk in applying it to the analysis of any text created in the postmodern era, when we do not deal with just one pattern of the monster creation. In this book, what will be taken into account are: monsters intentions and motivation, actions that define their status and mark their function within a text. Not trusting the popular culture tradition where monsters were 'bad,' it will be examined by analysing a particular text.

Urbańczyk and Pajaczkowski continue:

> Contrary to the image of a monster in fantasy addressed to an adult or older reader, creatures from literature addressed to a younger audience are, for obvious reasons, more grotesque or bizarre than horrifying and hideous. They may arouse respect, mild anxiety, but more often laughter, or caution. They usually serve as a warning to the young reader, and the educational function of the work dictates their presence. Often a monster from fantastical lands interacts with children from "our" world, which of course is supposed to bring the world presented to the reader and increase immersion [...]. Monsters are either mighty friends and guides of children through the lands of fantasy [....], or a reflection of the dangers of the everyday world, their distortion and the first serious problem that the adolescent hero has to face [...]. In the first case, they are a fantastic representation of parents and friends, mentors of the child, who help it overcome its first difficulties in life, and in the second, it prepares it to embrace adulthood. (352–353)

Another element of monstrosity came up in the above paragraph: the monster's look. Monsters of children's culture should not be 'horrifying' or 'hideous'; that would not be appropriate after all. Many works for young people find another way to fright their audience, and sometimes monsters are not the scariest part. They are often fought with laughter (358) as comedy becomes a weapon used by children. Thus monsters often pose as a sort of 'exotic animal,' well-known characters, but in masks, costumes. Both laughter and the grotesque make up the carnival, which is also one of the literary strategies within children's culture (Slany, 2016: 25; Czernow, 2012). The carnival comprising the whole world presented is visible in *Where the Wild Things Are*, where everyone and everything becomes wild. Despite multiple possibilities of approaching the issue of the monster in children's fantasy fiction, one thing is clear: monsters do not scare us the way they used to do.

Monsters of children's culture might still be antagonists, but also friends, just like in *Leonardo, the Terrible Monster* by Mo Willems (2005), where the titled monster is terrible at arousing fear in children and that is why he prefers to become a child's friend. They can also be neither of those two as they are often presented as creatures out of this world, out of the human moral system. Also, child heroes and heroines can be monsters, for example, Peter Pan, whose creation was inspired by classical mythology, can be read as a monstrous figure (see Chapter VI). In the postmodern world of children's culture, fear is not a monster-creating factor anymore. The only fear left would be that of adults concerned about their children's 'monstrous' interests and fascination with 'ugly,' 'scary,' 'different' creatures (Slany, 2017a: 15–16). This fear might also reflect the fear of the Other, a representative of the 'ugly,' 'scary' and 'different' in a particular society. Thus, unlike other scholars researching monstrosity in this area, I will not treat monsters

as something or someone scary, but as meaningful, or to be more precise, as signs referring to the meaning.

There are numerous types of monsters. Nowadays, we are not dealing with the 'pure' ancient ideas, which varied among themselves, of a certain kind of creature due to its previous cultural transformation. The example, elaborated later in this work, would be a siren, especially if we consider its Polish nomenclature. In Polish, the word 'syrena' applies to both the mythological siren (the one with wings) and a mermaid (a creature whose upper body is that of a woman and lower part that of a fish; Doroszewski, 1996: entry: "syrena")[58]. However, this example isolated from the wider phenomenon and quite eclectic[59] reflects the general trend of postmodern culture. The motif of the ancient monster not only evolved but also blended with motifs from different cultures.

Thus, sometimes it is tough to determine whether a character was actually inspired by antiquity – to distinguish it from the postmodern mixture of motifs and influences. Some mythological monsters have survived to modern times (Marciniak, 2020), and they will be the heroes and heroines of this book. Sometimes they will appear as rather funny and benign, sometimes scary and threatening. Even if monsters' 'true nature' and features have changed, and the child reader has now become accustomed to something different than was the case in the past, it is still important to confront their previous depictions with the contemporary ones in order to see whether they were excluded since the very beginning or whether it was maybe the doings of time.

More than a few books explore the mythical monstrosity and are, at the same time, a catalogue of ancient beasts, written for children.[60] One example would be a story from the "Little Master" series,[61] titled *The Odyssey* (2016) by Jennifer Adams and illustrated by Alison Oliver. As it is a book for preferably small children (carton covers, small format), the monsters on the cover do not seem scary at all, even if they say: "Grrrrr!" or "Roar!". It is a bestiary where various quotes are gathered from the actual *Odyssey* and adapted (the illustrations are properly adapted as well)

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[58]   In her book, Zofia Drapella (1976) elaborates on distinguishing sea monsters by detailing the different arrangements of their various body parts (p. 7). She also points out the multiplicity of inspiration in the case of contemporary monsters. She devotes a separate chapter to sirens and mermaids (p. 51–72).

[59]   Christopher Dell (2018) claims that "[...] in many romance languages, the word for 'mermaid' is *sirena* [...]." (119), presenting intricacies of this 'monstrous' name.

[60]   Other examples, to name a few, are: *Children's Book of Mythical Beasts and Magical Monsters: An Introduction to Fascinating Myths and Legends from Around the World* (Whillock-Moore, Philip, 2011); *Mythological Creatures: a Classical Bestiary* (Curlee, 2008); *Greek Mythology Stories for Kids: Monsters of the Greek Myths* (Pike, 2018).

[61]   The series is dedicated to small children, where famous texts are adapted for small readers. Other books in the series are, inter alia: *Little Master Shakespeare: a Midsummer Night's Dream* or *Little Master Verne: Around the World in 80 Days*.

for the child reader.[62] Each time, 'scary' or disturbing aspects of monsters are neutralised with laughter, proving Slany's thesis of making fun of the monster. For example, it is visible in Cyclops' case, where the monster is preparing to consume a human being in a 'decent' and 'civilised' way, i.e. by reading a cookbook while lying calmly with his sheep friends. Similarly surprising might be the depiction of sirens who look like angels from the Christian tradition, sitting on rocks on the sea resembling clouds and singing their songs. Adams' and Oliver's book indeed attempts to break stereotypes and show monsters in their old, yet somehow new image. Still, their monstrosity is only 'dressed-up' in a funny costume, to make them more approachable to little children, not making any reconstructions of their 'monstrous' origins.

Another new revelation in the form of a bestiary would be *Greece! Rome! Monsters!* by John Harris (2002), illustrated by Calef Brown. It opens with a "Warning!," saying: "Here's a bunch of these creepy creatures. *Read on if you dare!*" This book, written for older children (more texts, bigger format), can be considered a catalogue of mythical beasts, with short descriptions of each creature where 'the funny' intertwines with 'the scary.' According to the text, cyclops was "a very violent, huge guy," and the most famous one was Polyphemus, who was deprived of his only eye by Odysseus. According to the authors, this task was: "A rotten trick, but somebody had to do it." Cerberus is not one to mess with, and Sphinx, as the rumour says, "flipped out and jumped off a cliff. *Wow!*" Mythical monsters are perceived as morally indifferent, as it would seem that killing them is a hero's 'standard task,' not calling for ethical questions. Moreover, similarly to *The Odyssey* by Adams and Oliver, here sirens are also presented as 'plain women,' singing to Odysseus and tempting his crew to come to the shore. Depicted as a simple distraction (the embodiment of the 'siren song') with no reflection on how women can be monstrous and why they were imagined that way. *Greece! Rome! Monsters!*, even if considered enjoyable to a child reader, does not evoke any reflection on fantastic beasts, representations of the unknown, not ready to be neutralised.

Another example of direct mythological inspiration for the author would be *Atlante dei mostri e dei fantasmi piu spaventosi* [Atlas of the monsters and the scariest ghosts] by Federica Magrin (2018). In this compendium, the reader encounters monsters from different parts of the world and cultures, among them from mythology. Here, we find 'classics,' like cyclops, sirens, or chimaera, but also, which is just a little surprising, Circe,[63] the

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[62]   The opening example is Calypso, the nymph with a quote: "I keep Odysseus here with me, since I saved him from the wine-dark sea," followed by other characters from Homer's epic (Ino, the Sey Nymph; Lotus Eaters, etc).

[63]   The daughter of Circe also goes to Monster High, so she is a monster as well.

mythological witch[64] (that also appears in Adams' and Oliver's book). In the description, we find an explanation for including her in the texts. She does not resemble a 'traditional' monster, she is beautiful, but also very dangerous, because of her potions. As a witch, she corresponds to the concept of female monstrosity, just like the sirens. According to Magrin, sirens presented in cartoons are fake, as they are not friendly and are not even half-fish. Those scary and ruthless monsters just want to lure sailors with their songs and kill them without mercy (20). Like Harris and Brown, Magrin explores the horror of the monster stories, not reflecting on their past or possible motives. It is yet another example of a humorous book that uses horror to entertain children, which resembles 'the old trick.'

The last book I want to draw attention to is *Mythological Monsters of Ancient Greece* by Sara Fanelli (2006). In this work, the author takes the alternative approach of describing monsters, but also of illustrating them, in a unique manner, unusual for children's literature. The example would be again sirens, whose depictions are accosted with love, with heart-shaped faces and pink background. Barbara Weinlich (2015) writes that: "While Harris and Brown chose a word-image combination that may be subsumed under the category 'modern,' Fanelli opted for a style that is not so much modern, but simply different" (85). She also points out Fanelli's artistic values such as depictions of monsters evoking other than the traditional reading of a myth. Words play a lesser role in this book (104). Nevertheless, the concept of presenting sirens as seductive women, suggested by the heart-shape heads, does not solve the issue of presenting monsters in a somewhat stereotypical way. Even if Fanelli is the closest to looking at monsters from a different angle, the pictures' open interpretation might not be evident to children for whom the book was written.

Except for Fanelli's example, contemporary bestiaries (a continuation of medieval tradition) rarely offer broad depictions of mythological monsters, realising either the comic or frightening pattern in telling, barely retelling, children's classical stories. In the following chapters, I will look for something more than just the 'funny' and 'scary,' which have dominated the contemporary teratological narrative for young readers. My interest lies in what present-day monsters, inspired by classical mythology, stand for. Just like popular culture in general, I believe that what concerns children and young adults can bring something more than just entertainment. It can also carry a hint of how to read signs of exclusion and apply them to everyday life. The texts analysed in the following chapters have great potential to accomplish those goals.

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64   That also appears in Adams' and Oliver's book.
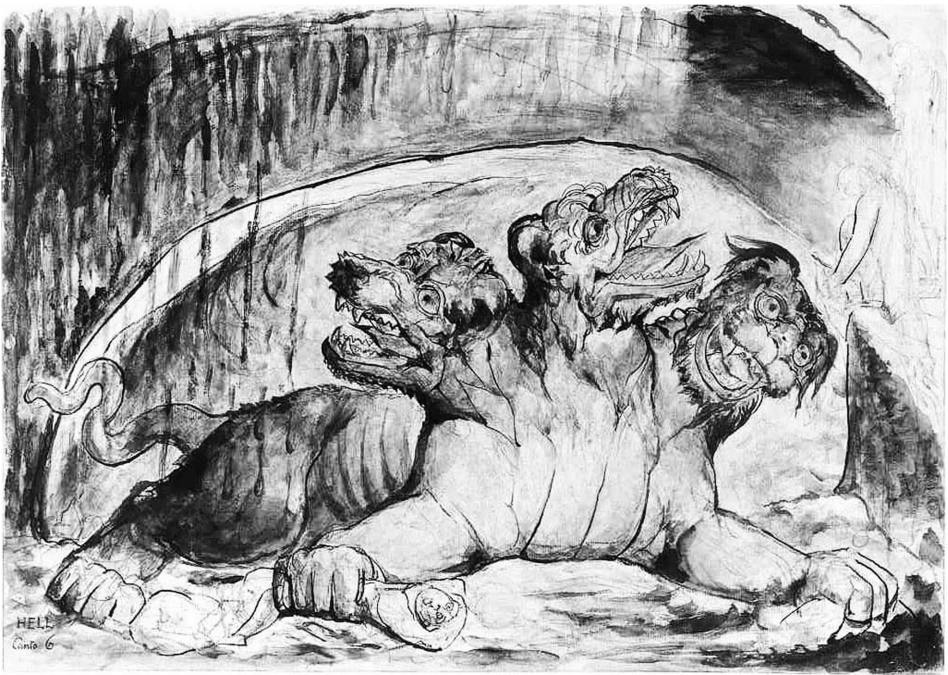
CHAPTER II:
THE MONSTROUS ANIMAL

Figure 2. Cerberus – the most loyal of all monsters

Animality in the construct of monster very often plays the role of a stigma, as this animality is often associated with wilderness, aggression, sexuality, primary needs, thus everything that 'civilised' people should restrain from (see Chapter I). This type of animal monster that represented nothing but danger and destruction takes different forms in contemporary popular culture dedicated to children and young adults. Sometimes it stays violent and scary, sometimes it turns into an adorable pet, sometimes it becomes protagonist's friend. The following analysis of selected examples will allow me to examine what functions monstrous animals play in culture for the youngest and how classical mythology can expose the problems of reality in the 20ᵗʰ and 21ˢᵗ centuries.

Ancient animals as a research subject are a complex issue, nearly impossible to grasp in one study.[65] From wild ones inhabiting mythical forests to divine beings turning themselves into animals to seduce earthly nymphs (see Chapter III), mythical animality has played a variety of roles throughout the history, including the ancient culture. Even though I am particularly concerned with the mythical animals from Greek and Roman mythology, or rather their reception in children's and young adult culture, it is still quite challenging to define those creatures in the first place. Therefore, in this chapter, only one type of animal will be examined: the monstrous one, which is still present in popular culture dedicated to the youngest at the turn of the 21ˢᵗ century. Invariably, I attempt to find the answer if (and in what way) animality is a marker of exclusion and of monstrosity.

Indeed, there are many ways to distinguish animal-like monsters of popular culture inspired by classical mythology from 'real' animals, even if the line between them is often very fluid. . The majority of such distinctions would probably be based on the monster's physique, consisting of disproportionately large claws, sharp teeth, furry bodies, etc. (see Chapter I). However, this is not the only category that distinguishes animal monsters from others present in Greek and Roman mythology. Thus, it might be claimed that mythological monsters form two major groups: those having or not having **human** anatomical (not psychological!) traits, which position the monster in question differently in relation to

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[65] Although there have been some attempts at doing so (Lewis, Llewellyn-Jones, 2018; Campbell, 2014).

what is human. Hence, in this chapter, only the latter group will be taken into consideration,[66] as what is human will be the subject of the following chapters.

Nonhuman monsters might symbolise nonhuman animals, threatening the ancients, usually perceiving them as beasts endangering human existence. Those fears found their place (among others) in the religion[67] and mythology of the ancients, where the antinomy of sublime power and meaningless mortality was certainly troubling. Liliane Bodson (1983) notes that: "Although the debate was to remain strongly anthropocentric, the early anthropology felt it necessary to define both the supernatural and subhuman creatures: gods and animals" (313). The scholar suggests that humans, in this particular context, were somehow suspended between two orders: the world of gods, to which they aspired, and the world of fauna that was degrading and needed to be dominated in order to sustain the impression of power. Some religious views were certainly reflected in classical mythology, where, in order to suppress the monstrous animals, 'narrators' had mythical heroes, ready to slay any creature standing on their way to greatness; hence, the vast number of monstrous depictions, beings without feelings or any emotions other than rage directed onto man, ready to kill.

An opening example representing the general idea of a monstrous and mythical animal in this chapter would be Typhon, Father of Monsters, a representative of relatively large group of monsters who do not appear in pop culture too often (i. g. Cetea, Charybdis, Scylla). According to Pindar (trans. Race, ed. 2014), Typhon was "the hundred-headed, whom the famous Cilician cave once reared" (221). The detailed description of the monster is also provided by Apoollodorus (trans. Frazer, ed. 2015) in *The Library*:

> [Typhon is] a hybrid between man and beast. In size and strength he surpassed all the offspring of Earth. As far as the thighs he was of human shape and of such prodigious bulk that he out-topped all the mountains, and his head often brushed the stars. One of his hands reached out to the west and the other to the east, and from them projected a hundred dragons' heads. From the thighs downward he had huge coils of vipers, which when drawn out, reached to his very head and emitted a loud hissing. His body was all winged: unkempt hair streamed on the wind from his head and cheeks; and fire flashed from his eyes. (47–49)

Only from Typhon's numerous descriptions in classical texts (i.e. Hesiod's *Theogony*, 820; *Homeric Hymn 3 to Pythian Apollo*, 300; Pseudo-Apollodors's

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[66]   E.g. creatures like sirens and centaurs will be analysed in the following chapters.

[67]   Here religion is only mentioned as a context, as it was very complex and varied among different regions and time periods.

Bibliotheca 1.39) one might notice that this particular beast might be an embodiment of both monstrosity (multiple body parts, spitting fire, destructible) and animality. It might also be an embodiment of otherness, nonnormativity. Certainly, such a creature could not survive in the world of heroic mythology ruled by men (see Chapter III). Typhon was defeated by Zeus, with the help of Athena, and held in Tartarus as punishment for the destruction it had caused.[68] Nonetheless, it is crucial to point out that Typhon is considered the Father of Monsters, among others, to Orthus, Cerberus, Hydra of Lerna, etc. (Hesiod, *Theogony,* trans. Most, ed. 2006: 27–29). It is considered the Father of Monsters in the similar way as Echidna is the Mother. This monstrous family represents the idea of a monster to its fullest, analysed in this book. Typhon – not clear whether there was one of him or two – has the potential to be considered as a pure example of the animal-based monster derived from classical antiquity. Consisting of many animal parts, mostly heads, is excluded almost automatically from the society represented by Olympus. As a tool of the gods' revenge, he was created to hurt others, and as a monster, Typhon was not compatible with Olympian life standards.

<div align="center">*</div>

As we will see in the following examples, some of the monstrous animals reclaimed their reputation in the 21st-century culture as 'not-so-evil' after all. They gained history, subjectivity, motive and, most importantly, a voice. Unfortunately, Typhon was not one of them. Being a very rare creature among pop culture texts for the youngest, it can be found in Lucy Coats's *Beasts of Olympus* series (2015-2018) that will appear in this book on several occasions (for a detailed description of the series see Chapter VI). The main protagonist of the books, Demon, a child beast keeper on Olympus, meets Typhon stuck in a volcano. The monster is presented as an evil creature, with luminous eyes and sharp teeth and has no traits of the redeemed monster that could stand for a sign of exclusion. It arouses no compassion or empathy from Demon, and ought to be defeated as he represents only aggression and danger.

Typhon is projected by Coats (2018) to scare, to endanger. As we read: "[Typhon]'s a terrible hundred-headed monster. [...] Every one of his head is some sort of animal-bears, lions, dragons, that sort of thing [...]" (24; original grammar) and later on: "Each head was a hundred times the size of the actual animal, and each was clearly furious" (35). No human heads to be found there. Typhon is an embodiment of the monstrous animality that even in the 21st century could not be accepted as a misunderstood

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[68]   Some say that Typhon was buried at the foot of Etna, and perceived as a revenge tool of Gaia.

beast, as if its monstrosity was constructed of the fear for all the hundred animals that it consists of.

The above example shows a rather simple translation of ancient thought about animal monsters into the language of children's literature. Although many ancient texts are filled with precursory thought on nonhuman animals,[69] researchers stress: "Passages in which a literary character shows downright pity for a suffering animal character are, for the most part, fairly rare" (Korhonen, Ruonakoski, 2017: 5). At the same time, there is no denying that:

> [...] ancient Greek texts often make us face the taboos of our own time, presenting different sets of rules for decency, attitudes to children and gender, social hierarchies, ways of relating to animals, to death, and so on. There is a constant interplay of foreignness on the other. Not only do these texts communicate to us certain kinds of relationships to non-human animals, they put us in the position where we can, in a way relive those relationships. (11)

Returning to mythology – or rather a contemporary idea of it (see the Introduction) – might allow us to reflect on the monstrous animals from a different perspective and recreate the path of the modern thought's development. What is also worth considering is the fact that: "[...] a literary animal figure does not represent an animal in the sense of giving us a copy of the animal. Instead, it makes present the network of meanings related to that particular animal" (12). It is a returning concept that an animal is, just like a monster, a construct with ideas assigned to it by anthropocentric culture.

Mythological hybrids, also those consisting of nonhuman animal parts, provoke the discussion about the line between humanity and animality from the social and cultural point of view. Those cultural constructs differ and are put in separate places in the social hierarchy. What is more, hybrid monsters connecting humanity and animality represent all those traits that society does not accept as 'normal' and develop 'unnatural' behaviour.[70] Such depictions of hybrids, apart from eating people and

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[69]   Mainly considering Aristotle's: *History of Animals*, *Generation of Animals*, etc. Kari Weil (2012) points to the philosopher as a starting point of the development of some form of animal studies by claiming: "Since Aristotle, man (as used in most texts) has been defined as the "rational animal," distinguished from other animals by his (and, more recently, her) ability to think and to reason. But this distinctive property has come under much questioning in recent years as we learn almost daily how many other species do something that appears to be thinking – whether in the ways they prepare their nests or hide their food or court their mates" (xv).

[70]   For example, werewolves do not travel in packs as the wolves do. Lonely wolves being a threat to the main character appear frequently in fairy tales (Slany, 2014: 53). However, in TV-series like *The Originals* (2013-2018, creat. Plec), for example, werewolves form packs and live together as an excluded community of fantastic creatures.

spreading disease, are unnatural and part of biological and cultural deformation. Hybrids are suspended between two worlds; they are often undefinable, and thanks to that, perfectly fit the concept of monstrosity.

Research on ancient animal proves to be also accurate in the light of animal studies. Bodson (1983) claims that: "The relationship between man and animal is directly affected by the cultural and intellectual environment of the societies and civilizations on which it is rooted" (312). The animal itself is considered the cultural Other, an excluded unit with a few rights and inferior to humans. As Katarzyna Kleczkowska (2014) points out by citing John Heath: "[...] animals «have been often provided the fundamental metaphor of Otherness»" (97, after Heath: 315). She continuous thus:

> [b]eing this element of the environment, which is most similar to man, animals were an ideal starting point for defying humanity by an opposition – in the same way as the ancient Greek men defined themselves in contrast to woman, barbarians, slaves or metics (resident aliens). (97–98)

Although Kleczkowska exploits the figure of the Other, her thesis of animals being the opposite to humans can apply to teratology and the figure of the monster. Also, in the context of her study, **monsters –** including the mythical ones **– mean** (see Chapter I); they are not beings existing in isolation, but in culture, in a particular context. Beth Berkowitz (2015) claims that just like animals, a cultural construct, monsters (in her interpretation: Others) carry meaning beyond a pragmatic understanding of the world and become symbols of culture, and on many levels (50; also see Marrone, Mangano, 2018: 123). This meaning is constantly constructed on the opposition to the norm represented by the human, which sends us back to antiquity. As Berkowitz continuous:

> Late ancient inquiries into the animal mind allow us to observe the function of similarity and difference, and of [the] center and [its] limits, in late ancient knowing. Animals provided the tantalizing possibility of different, only partly penetrable knowing subjects. **Knowledge about animals thus served extraordinarily well to help distinguish between self and Other among human beings and to serve as a metaphor and parallel for the tensions, fears, mysteries, and attractions in that relationship.** Knowledge about animals, like knowledge about various human Others, combined what was taken for granted with imaginative challenges to it. Thus did the project of knowing animals—especially trying to know what they knew—populate the margins of late ancient reality with its fantastic Others, creatures unusual or impossible, like the flying camels and massive snakes of the Mishnah, or the Talmud's clever ox. (50, emphasis added)

Just like in Kleczkowska's work, utilizing the figure of the Other, it seems the monster figure could easily be used here as well, especially

since Berkowitz recalls "creatures unusual or impossible," with emphasis on monstrous animals. Also, the animal must play the role of a monster as a threshold figure, frightening, symbolising the unknown. Animals "served frequently in antiquity to define the limits of reality. Animals sit at the edge of personhood, like a variety of human characters — women, children, slaves, foreigners" (36–37), constructs that will come back in the next chapters of the book. Often perceived as 'impossible creatures,' many animals were monsters pre-eminently. Some have remained so to this day.

At the turn of the 21ˢᵗ century, animal studies are considered one of the New Humanities' methodology. Animals set the limits of humanity and are allies of all marginalised beings. That is why I start the 'monstrous' analysis with the animal, as it is the construct that connects all representatives of various types of exclusion analysed in the following chapters. This way I also want to prove that the discussion about animals and monsters actually started in antiquity and found its way into modern times after two thousand years of animal or animal-related studies.

Animal Studies and Teratology

As was already raised in the previous chapter, "Who is the monster?" is probably one of the most troubling questions that appear in teratology. A similar problem applies when asking another question: "Who is the animal?," which often appears, as we will see, in animal studies.[71] The second one, concerning animals, would be probably even more frequent, as many fantastic beasts of our very world are considered somewhat mythological monsters. Some are even named after them: the yeti crab, the medusa, the hydra, the Dracula ant, etc. However, this notion is indeed ambiguous. Living in the Anthropocene, where humans have dominated the world, animals can be perceived as victims, not monsters. This name is more suitable for those who have irreversibly destroyed the Earth. From the ecological perspective, monsters would be people who, without consideration for other beings, have taken what they thought belonged to them, terrorised animals perceived as a threat, and established their power most viciously. Such a figure of a **human eco-monster** is used

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[71] What Berkowitz (2015) underlines: "Thus the Stoics ended up attributing to animals— whom they called aloga, creatures without reason, rather than the more inclusive zōia (living beings) or the conventional thēria (beasts)—very little capacity beyond the most superficial apprehension of appearances" (38)." Here the now more common word "monster" would apply perfectly, "thēria" are those types of animals that will be analysed in this book. Also Liliane Bodson (1983), in order to present the human-animal relationship in Greco-Roman antiquity, uses the phrase "subhuman" animals (312) which already adds to the rich repository of similar terms (other, strange, alien, monster...).

in journalism,[72] and academic research (Banerjee, 2016: 205). The concept of a monster in the human and nonhuman animal relationship certainly works both ways and is never stable. In ecological discourse, the animal monster remains a true shapeshifter.

One of the significant researchers in the field of human-animal studies, Donna Haraway (2008), claims that:

> Modernist versions of humanism and posthumanism alike have taproots in a series of what Bruno Latour calls the Great Divides between what counts as nature as a society, as nonhuman and as human. Whelped in the Great Divides, the principal Others to Man, including his "posts," are well documented in ontological breed registries in both past and present Western cultures: gods, machines, animals, monsters, creepy crawlies, women, servants and slaves, and noncitizens in general. (9–10)

Discussing the concept of animal in the context of monstrosity seems quite apparent. Many fictional monsters have nonhuman animal traits: fur, claws, fangs, etc., as it was mentioned before in this chapter. They often remind us of real-life animals, not only because of their looks but also behaviour: monstrous animals threaten people, embody their fears, are desired by them in various ways. Also, as Haraway points out, animality and monstrosity are in close relation with each other and should not be examined in isolation. Amy Ratelle (2015) recalls this scholar specifically, as she writes that:

> Haraway's ongoing objective is to link the life sciences to philosophical questions of the animal and, in doing so, collapse traditional boundaries between nature and culture. [...] When Haraway invokes this term ["natureculture"], **she is discussing the intersections and overlaps between the established binary of nature and culture to demonstrate that engaging with the non-human animal itself presents a new means by which to explore human/animal relations in a way that no longer privileges the human.** And in collapsing the boundary between nature and culture, other boundaries also falter. (51, emphasis added)

While inspecting the animal, it would maybe be more accurate to acknowledge the idea of it rather than the actual creature, its depiction (also in popular culture) before its anatomical description, especially if it may not necessarily correspond to a real nonhuman animal, but also other excluded groups. That is why classical mythology – the collection of ideas about the world – might also be a good reference platform.

The animal is just one more construct excluded from society, and this exclusion is at par with other forms of marginalisation, like sexism (see

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[72] George Monbiot (2014) from *The Guardian* wrote that: "We have always been the nemesis of the planet's wildlife" (n.d.).

Chapter III) or racism (see Chapter V). As Kari Weil (2012) accurately points out, alluding to Peter Singer's work on *speciesism*:

> Although [Peter] Singer has had enormous influence over the years in the area of animal rights, his effort to put the discrimination against nonhuman species on par with the prejudicial treatment and injustices caused by sexism or racism has had less success; the fight against speciesism has not had the same force in the academy, perhaps until now. (3)

Weil is probably the most vital voice in animal studies who frequently underlines the connections between nonhuman cultural figures and other minorities. She explicitly writes: "If animal studies have come of age, it is perhaps because nonhuman animals have become a limit case for theories of difference, otherness, and power" (5), which corresponds with the concept of a monster, something that needs to be examined and included. As Weil sums up in the introduction of a *Report in the Animal Turn*:[73]

> Like trauma studies, animal studies thus stretches to the limit questions of language, epistemology, and ethics that have been raised in various ways by women's studies and postcolonial studies: how to understand and give voice to others or to experiences that seem impervious to our means of understanding; how to hear and acknowledge what it may not be possible to say. (7)

Even more so, the category of 'beast' rather closely connected to 'monster' is examined by Weil discussing the work of Jacques Derrida (*Animal That Therefore I Am*). In this rather long, but necessary to recall paragraph, she points to the problem concerning naming the beasts, analysed in the previous chapter, whereas here precisely related to the concept of an animal :

> Bêtise, which is most often translated as "stupidity," is a word that Derrida uses to describe the kind of knowledge that excludes real thinking. It is a word he takes from the nineteenth-century French author Gustav Flaubert (among others), whose novel Bouvard and Pécuchet illustrates the particular stupidity of attempting to master the world through a cataloging of knowledge [which also can be related to the concept of bestiary – AM]. "La Bêtise," wrote Flaubert in a famous letter, "consists in wanting to conclude." Of course, [the] French word for beasts (bête) is that it refers to a kind of beastly stupidity that is proper to humans. "The animal," Derrida reminds us, "cannot be bête." According to the distinctions we humans make between animals and ourselves, animals cannot be stupid in this way. Is this why real thinking must begin in

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[73] The title is the allusion to Kafka's a *Report for an Academy*. a quote from this novel also appears in the beginning of this chapter, as the motif of an animal and a monster frequently appears in Kafka's works. See Lucht, Yarri, 2010.

or through our confrontation with the look of animals, through their gaze upon us and upon the world, a gaze that ignores our conclusions? "The best literature," Derrida writes, citing Gilles Deleuze, "lets itself be 'haunted' by bêtise, haunted by the problem of bêtise. It is haunting in literature as well as in the visual arts, philosophy, and theory that is the focus of this book insofar as it results from our encounters with animals and our relations with them. Our engagement with animals may reveal to us our particular human stupidity, and it is only by deeply attending to suggest, that we may be able to think otherwise and overcome some of the limitations of our so-called rational condition. (Weil, 2012: xvi)

The process of reason and being rational might recall Aristotle and his reflections on the rational animal in: *Nicomachean Ethics* I. 13, where he perceived a human being as the superior being due to their rational principle. However, the process of naming the animal, just like naming the monster, carries a stigma; ascribes it meanings, and acquires different labels. The cited paragraph also shows that various names for monsters rarely correspond directly to their Latin roots, but rather are products of language development. The general phenomenon of naming takes us back to the biblical tradition where in Genesis it was a man who named animals as superior to them, holding the power to name. Also, the metaphor of literature being 'haunted' by the beast can be related to works by Liz Gloyn (2019): *Tracking Classical Monsters in Popular Culture* and the multi-authored monograph edited by Katarzyna Marciniak: *Chasing Mythical Beasts: The Reception of Ancient Monsters in Children's and Young Adults' Culture* (2020), in which she decided to use the metaphor of chasing, rather than meeting.[74]

*

In the *Routledge Handbook of Human-Animal Studies* (Marvin, McHugh, 2014) we read:

> The younger children's narrative ethics gesture towards a more radical, interdisciplinary understanding of animal subjectivity that could nourish biological conservation, inclusive environmental and animal ethics, and more politically focused humane education. The dream of a heterogeneous form of environmental citizenship requires that we keep and consider all the pieces and contradictions, particularly as they emerge from children's culture, because we never know what they might tell us, and where they might fit, as we keep imagining and re-imagining the possibilities for human-animal studies. (272)

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[74] A similar issue applies to a metaphor used by Asa Simon Mittman (2016). He writes that monsters "not only challenge and question; they trouble, they worry, they haunt"(1). I distance myself from such an attitude in my work, once again postulating a form of encounter with monsters and an attempt at mutual understanding rather than alienation.

Texts for the youngest are full of monsters[75] as well as animals (Mik, Pokora, Skowera, 2016: 9). Very often those two constructs overlap. Indeed, the concept of a monstrous animal is not homogeneous, especially in children's and young adult culture.[76] Almost every non-human animal has an element of monstrosity in it, and vice versa – one searches in vain for a monster that does not have an animal element in it. Although the proportions corresponding to these two cultural constructs are changing, in principle there is no monstrosity without animality and no animality without monstrosity.

These two categories are the main topic of *Człowiek jaki jest, każdy widzi* [What a human being is like, everyone sees][77] by Marzena Matuszak (2017). The story reveals the secret of Yetis' hotel for animals, where humans have never been before. Each animal guest: a mosquito, a cat, a pig, a sloth, and others, describe humans from their perspective and experience. For the mouse, which associates humans with big diggers, *Homo sapiens* are above all huge destroyers; for the wolf, humans are fairy-tale characters that once deceived its ancestors (we are talking, of course, about Little Red Riding Hood); for the shark, humans are characters with many tentacles, in which they get entangled and thus kill thousands of marine animals. As it turns out, almost all of those stories create quite a horrific picture of a human being. Illustrations accompanying the fable present humans as animals imagined them, i.e. consisting of many animal parts, posing as scary monsters.

At some point in the story, the dog warns the company that a human is coming. Everyone panics, afraid of the mythical creature that wants to eat or kill all the inhabitants of Yeti's hotel.[78] At this point, father Yeti admits that he has met a human before. Earlier, he had only heard stories about these monsters; he says "Humans fascinated me, while at the same time I was afraid of them" (46). This clearly alludes to the concept of monstrosity described in the previous chapter, especially the concept of the Other and othering. As it turns out, father Yeti met a Himalayan climber who was on the verge of death. He describes the man as a relatively small, weird-smelling creature who was not accustomed to such severe conditions (51). After he and his father saved the climber's life, they left, hoping that the man would think of their meeting as if it was a dream.

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[75] I describe this phenomenon in Chapters I and VI, hence its omission in this part of the analysis.

[76] Numerous examples are described in Chapter I.

[77] The title is clear allusion to the Polish reader. The original phrase: "Koń, jaki jest, każdy widzi" [What a horse is like, everyone sees] orignally comes from the writings of Benedykt Chmielowski (Polish priest and a writer from the 18th century). Today, the phrase is used in everyday language to express the obviousness and/or plainless of something.

[78] Like in the animated movie: *Hotel Transylvania* (dir. Tartakovsky, 2012) where monsters hide from people.

For all we know, just as Yetis are a figment of our imagination, in this case we are a figment of theirs.

Człowiek jaki jest, kazdy widzi shows in a very concise yet well-thought-out form that the concept of monstrosity is relative: human and nonhuman animals and their perspective towards each other might not be so different after all. Within human-animal studies there is a possibility to bend the line between those two cultural constructs, as *Homo sapiens* biologically is an animal as well. To shift the focus from the human to the nonhuman animal, to present a particular story from a not-anthropocentric point of view, the figure of a monster and monstrosity might come in very handy, as it could be applied to both human and nonhuman categories.

This was only one of many examples from children's and young adult culture where concepts of monstrosity and animality meet.[79] Since antiquity the connection between animals and human children has been highlighted in multiple texts (see Chapter VI). It would be a seemingly accurate statement to make that before we had more detailed knowledge about animals in general, their status and welfare were less appreciated and very much neglected. However, ancient moralists and philosophers

> campaigned for the animal defence by writing, lecturing on the matter, and by teaching the children to respect the animals [...], since they thought it to be more effective to prevent rather than to have to curb or even to prosecute the animal abuses. (Bodson, 1983: 318–319)

Allegedly, the situation of animals in antiquity was much better than it is now, in the era of mass production, efficiency aspirations and high-rate consumption. This also corresponds to the enlightenment concept of John Locke who believed that children are evil creatures and they would hurt any animal if left with them alone (see Chapter VI). The child-animal relationship and co-relation will be described in Chapter VI of this book. In the next part, I would like to focus on those creatures that correspond to the concept of monstrous animal and are inspired by Graeco-Roman mythology. Here, I will centre my analysis around beasts from the Harry Potter saga, with the acknowledgment that there are certainly many more works for youngsters worth acknowledging and exploring.

Monstrous Animals of the Wizarding World

In the third book of the *Harry Potter* saga, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999), the Care of the Magical Creatures, Hogwart's class on

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[79]   It is also a popular motif in the *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* TV-series (2010-2019) by Lauren Faust; the *Beasts of Olympus* book series (2015-2018) by Lucy Coats; the *Fableheaven* book series (2006-2010) by Brandon Mull, etc.

fantastic animals, is taken over by Rubeus Hagrid, gamekeeper and Keeper of the Keys, one of Harry's best friends. A schoolbook Hagrid had advised his students to purchase is a rather strange, maybe even dangerous item, a monstrous creature. Before the school year starts, Hagrid sends a copy to Harry, who approaches the parcel with understandable caution:

> Harry put the leather case aside and picked up his last parcel. He recognized the untidy scrawl on the brown paper at once: this was from Hagrid, the Hogwarts gamekeeper. He tore off the top layer of paper and glimpsed something green and leathery, but before he could unwrap it properly, the parcel gave a strange quiver, and whatever was inside it snapped loudly — as though it had jaws.
>
> Harry froze. He knew that Hagrid would never send him anything dangerous on purpose, but then, Hagrid didn't have a normal person's view of what was dangerous. Hagrid had been known to befriend giant spiders, buy vicious, three-headed dogs from men in pubs, and sneak illegal dragon eggs into his cabin. Harry poked the parcel nervously. It snapped loudly again. Harry reached for the lamp on his bedside table, gripped it firmly in one hand, and raised it over his head, ready to strike. Then he seized the rest of the wrapping paper in his other hand and pulled.
>
> And out fell — a book. Harry just had time to register its handsome green cover, emblazoned with the golden title **The Monster Book of Monsters,** before it flipped onto its edge and scuttled sideways along the bed like some weird crab.
>
> "Uh-oh," Harry muttered.
>
> The book toppled off the bed with a loud clunk and shuffled rapidly across the room. Harry followed it stealthily. The book was hiding in the dark space under his desk. (Rowling, 1999: 15; emphasis added)

The Monster Book of Monsters by Edwardus Lima is not monstrous just because of its name. Its looks, behaviour, even the place where it hides, imply the monstrous nature of the book. Bringing various objects into life is a rather common strategy in Rowling's magical world. Sometimes objects even get a personality[80] and motives; they often decide for themselves to leave their owners or even harm them – as *The Monster Book* does. In the case of this schoolbook we do not get many insights into its content, unlike in the case of *Fantastic Beasts* for first-years attending the Care of the Magical Creatures, as we have the access to the actual book. It might seem as if *The Monster Book* enters the magical world for a different reason: to educate, for sure, but not necessarily about magical fauna exclusively.

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[80] There are numerous examples of 'mean' or even 'cruel' objects: the examples could be the quidditch balls, bludgers and the golden snitch, who seem like having 'a mind of their own,' flying where they will. Also wands have some sort of free will, as they choose their owners and decide themselves to whom they will respond.

To open the book, the reader must strike its spine (Rowling, 1999: 87). Otherwise, their fingers will be probably bitten off. However, we do not know its exact content. Although we may be certain, it concerns various magical creatures, for example, the hippogriff that the class in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* (Rowling, 1999) is about to encounter. The hippogriff, Buckbeak, seems like a very dangerous and unfriendly creature, and most of the students are afraid of him. Nevertheless, as it turns out, befriending him only requires knowing how to behave around the creature. One just needs to bow to it and wait for the beast to bow back. Buckbeak might stand for any real-life wild creature which humans fear, mainly because they do not understand it. And so does *The Monstrous Book* itself.

A similar analogy in hippogriff's depiction has been observed by Steve Backshall (2018), who writes:

> Harry's attitude to Buckbeak is one that any experienced animal handler would applaud. The first rule of working with wild animals is respect – for their space, their safety and their wellbeing. With intelligent animals it is vital to let them take the lead, just as Harry was advised to do with Buckbeak, only approaching once the hippogriff had returned his bow. If I'm diving with an adult male sea lion, for example, I understand he has the ability to tear me limb from limb. Therefore, if we are to be friends, it must be on his terms. I keep my distance, swim around trying to look like an interesting plaything, and hope that his curiosity gets the better of him! (190)

Buckbeak, just like Backshall's sea lion, can be 'monstrous,' but only to those who reject education, like Malfoy, who ends up being hurt after approaching the hippogriff too fast. 'Monstrous' here becomes a marker of 'fear' of the Other, an animal which in the anthropocentric, or 'wizardocentric,' reality lives on the periphery of human perception of the world. It would be precisely the same as with *The Monster Book of Monsters*. If the reader does not know how to use it, it will literally bite back. In such a way, a schoolbook for the Care of the Magical Creatures embodies the concept of monstrosity on various levels. It also explicitly represents Rowling's idea of how monsters and animals are entangled in the destructive discourse of dangerous creatures, which, in most cases, are simply misunderstood.

As has already been pointed out many times,[81] the Harry Potter books are, in part, based on antiquity. Not only spells and various names come from Latin, but also motifs, narrative strategies and characters are deeply

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[81]   Cf. Richard A. Spencer (2015), *Harry Potter and the Classical World: Greek and Roman Allusions in J.K. Rowling's Modern Epic*; Christine Walde (2016), *Graeco-Roman Antiquity and Its Productive Appropriation: The Example of Harry Potter*; Elżbieta Olechowska (2016), *J.K. Rowling Exposes the World to Classical Antiquity.*

rooted in classical texts and aesthetics. In looking for monsters inspired by Greek and Roman mythology, we also come across those who do not have visible classical traits. Nonetheless, it does not mean they could not be perceived as being connected to antiquity.

Animals in the Harry Potter universe are divided into two main groups: magical creatures and beasts from 'our' world. Those two groups overlap, as, for example, the dodo is the vanishing bird diricawl for wizards (Rowling, 2009: 17–18; see Mik, 2021). Also, both types of creatures are used by wizards to produce objects for everyday needs: chickens for food, cows for leather;[82] wands are made out of phoenix's feathers or unicorn hair, potion ingredients are sourced from dragons and other magical animals. However, magical creatures do not serve for clothes or food; they have a different status in the magical world, where 'ordinary' animals are treated as meaningless objects. Students of Hogwarts eat roast chicken and sausages, never unicorn legs, or dragon steak.

Nevertheless, in her books, Rowling included some fascinating ideas concerning animality and monstrosity. She might not always be accurate in describing the human-nonhuman animal relationship, but indeed her intentions were focused around the idea of inclusiveness, which we may also find in other books.

The Power of Naming[83]

In her study, Jen Harrison (2018) points out the importance of power relations in the Wizarding World; only those who can use a wand have real power and can also explicitly manifest it before magical, but not privileged creatures – among others, also fantastic beasts (331). "[...] The wand" – as she claims – "is a tool used to focus and augment the power of the wizard; by denying this power to nonhuman creatures, wizards can maintain an ontological separation in terms of magical ability" (331). The wand law determines the hierarchy in the Potterverse, which is explicitly shown in the relationship between wizards and the house-elves (331, see Chapter V).

The essential function of the wand is to evoke magic by expressing – not necessarily verbally – the name of the spell. Names as such are significant in the whole series,[84] as they are, ultimately, the most powerful

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[82]   In winter Hagrid wears a moleskin overcoat, rabbit-fur gloves and enormous beaverskin boots (Rowling, 1997: 133).
[83]   The following section of the book is based on the article: *Magizoology: the magical creatures studies* (Mik, 2017). In the next examples, in which I refer to my own analysis, I put a similar information. A list of all the publications I use in the book is at the beginning of the bibliography section.
[84]   A lot of them have Latin roots (Spencer, 2015: 7).

tool. Beatrice Groves (2017) notes: "Rowling thinks very carefully about her names: 'names are really crucial to me... And for some reason I just can't move on until I know I've called them the right thing' (19)." Groves also recalls that:

> Plato's dialogue [Cratylus] suggests that if names have no inherent link to the things they signify then language is arbitrary, but if there is some intrinsic connection between the name and the thing named then language could be seen as a divinely inspired guide to reality. (21)

The language used by J. K. Rowling in the *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007), as well as in *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (2001), carries a crucial role in recognising who is in power, who gives the name, who is receiving it. The author managed to incorporate some thoughts on nonhuman animals, mainly using legendary and mythological figures. These figures' behaviour and interactions with the series' characters show not only how Rowling perceives so-called real 'animals,' but also how they see each other. What is more, they seem to ask what it means to name somebody 'a beast.' Let us now investigate Rowling's works using human–animal studies as a framework to discuss how fantasy fiction reflects contemporary world issues.

Where is 'the Animal'?

Kleczkowska (2014) begins her article with an outline of the word 'animal' in its ancient and present meanings, as she claims this is "the fundamental problem we have to face while studying the attitude to animals in ancient Greek thought [...]" (98). Also, one of the most important sentences, although in the 21st century maybe a little outdated, in Derrida's (2000) essay *The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)* is: "Animal is a word that men have given themselves the right to give" (400). In the referred paper, according to Weil (2010), Derrida denounces the notion of 'the animal' as a 'capacious concept' used to mark every living thing that exists while not being a human (16–17). "The animal, what a word!" and, as we will see later, what a word indeed. The use of this term and its consequences are also an issue discussed by Haraway, who highlights the problem of perceiving nonhuman animals from the anthropocentric point of view. Starting off with the topic of language describing animals, which already settles the way of thinking about these beings, the above-mentioned scholars discuss the problem of categorising nonhuman animals by using the power of discourse. In her most famous work, *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* (2012), Weil proves (inter alia) that simply the use of language determines the relationships to attain within human power. Some nonhuman animals can learn to

communicate on a basic level, but it is the human being who puts out the idea of language itself which is always conceptual (Weil, 2010: 22). Such concepts, however, can be very dangerous. As Ludwig Wittgenstein said years ago, "[t]he limits of my language are the limits of my world" (Mitralexis, 2015: 50), and it is a person's decision where those limits are to be laid down – should other animals be included or excluded from the universe of discourse reserved for and distributed by *Homo sapiens*?

Children's and young adult literature also reflects the figures created in the world of language, which is – once again – a powerful tool to utilise in every discourse. In this analysis only human language will be discussed, since it is the "terror of naming" the subject and object at the same time. Naming and being named; both these actions settle the hierarchy of who stands above whom. The one who has the power to categorise a being as 'the monster' gains far more importance than the ones who are named. In this analysis, 'monsters' are nonhuman animals and their position in our world is undoubtedly lower than the position of humans. In the horrific act of naming (that also includes children when they are naming the world surrounding them), we should seek for the hidden ethical dialogue, developed and commented by various authors, including those who write books for children and young adults.

Monstrous Pets and Their Owners

Looking at the relationships of owners and pets[85] we might come to the conclusion that they are, by nature, constructed upon the relation of power – most usually between humans being in charge and animals subjected to their will. Weil (2012) even asks: "Is a pet an animal?" (53), as it is the creation of a human, needing a life companion, serving them for various reasons. However, as Anna Feuerstein and Carmen Nolte-Odhiambo (2017) underline while discussing similarities between childhood and pethood:

> Conceiving of this power structure as purely one-directional, however, would further contribute to a discourse that has positioned children and pets as passive subjects, relegating them to a marginalized space of (public and political) invisibility. Rather, we suggest that even though children and pets are frequently constructed and imagined within familiar modes

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[85]   Feuerstein and Odhiambo (2017) write: "Although there has been increased objection to the word 'pet' accompanied by a recent move toward the more egalitarian term 'companion animal,' our use of 'pet' and 'pethood' is deliberate, as we engage the power dynamics that shape the discourses surrounding animals that live with humans" (3–4). Following this thought I am also using the word 'pet,' as it accurately establishes the relation of power, which is crucial to my analysis. However, in the everyday use 'pet' might also have positive connotations.

of patriarchy, anthropocentrism, and domestication, their agency and alterity embody alternative voices, subjectivities, and models of kinship and belonging. After all, the fact that constructions of childhood and pethood are haunted by the notion of a raw, uncivilized wildness might well indicate that the subjects occupying these spaces are not that easily controlled and contained. (3)

I believe what Rowling did in the Harry Potter series to some extent reflects notions presented by the scholars. Owner–pet relationships in the Wizarding World are special, based on a magical connection, and often require sacrifice from both sides. Students of Hogwarts are allowed to have an owl, a cat or a toad, often choosing to go their own way and are not always by their owners' side. Hagrid owns a dog, Fang, who – scared of many things – seems to find a safe place in a half-giant's hut. Crookshanks, Hermione's cat, turns out to be very intelligent: he tries to make the characters aware of Scabbers, Ron's rat, actually being Peter Pettigrew, murderer of Harry's parents (Dresang, 2002: 227–228). The free will magical pets establish during the story make them something more than just their masters' properties – they gain subjectivity, agency, their own point of view. As it turns out, free will, culturally not natural for pets, make them monsters.

For many human–animal studies scholars, naming a being 'an animal' (or 'a beast') is, as was mentioned above, a powerful, yet severe act. It is all the more crucial, and even a little surprising, that we can find a similar issue discussed by Rowling, especially in *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (see Chapter I). Monstrous pets of the Wizarding World almost always have to be kept in isolation, usually to protect them and not the outside world. There are only several types of animal-like characters (with no humanoid features)[86] in the Harry Potter series which qualify as creatures that we can, without a doubt, call mythical: phoenixes, Basilisk, Cerberus and Pegasus. Throughout the series Rowling tries to answer some questions posed in *Fantastic Beasts...* and to decentralise the human position in the world of magic.

The Phoenix originated in Ethiopia, although this bird was frequently mentioned by Greek and Roman writers such as Herodotus (*The Persian Wars*, trans. Godley, 2015: 359).[87] Pierre Grimal (2008) writes

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[86] Human–animal hybrids will appear later in the book, as they stand for different issues and not only animality. As Harrison points out: "[...] throughout the Harry Potter corpus a variety of animals and objects take on disturbingly human characteristics through magic, becoming hybrids of both categories "[and] the monstrous is a means of defining the human through opposition: in the Harry Potter books it is the male wizard who occupies the norming position, defined by difference from or similarity to creatures with a variety of magical abilities and physical characteristics" (332).

[87] Also, some sources say that the phoenix "probably derived from the Ancient Egyptian Bennu mentioned in *The Book of the Dead*" (Ruickbie, 2016: 154).

that: "The phoenix was supposed to look like an eagle, but **an eagle of extraordinary size**" (100; emphasis added) – a monster, one might say. Its feathers were multicolour, and they shone fire-red, sky blue and gold. Tanya Kirk (2018) points out that: "Phoenixes are historically associated with the Sun. The crest of the seven feathers on the bird's head corresponds to the seven rays which traditionally emit from the head of Helios, the Greek god of the Sun" (*History of Magic*, 221) On the day a Phoenix dies, it bursts into flames and its offspring is born out of the parent's ashes. Later on, in the 13th-century, the phoenix became a symbol of resurrection and up to this day "signifies the eternal life of the faithful Christian" (220).

In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998), Harry meets Fawkes, the phoenix, on the day it dies. The bird does not resemble an eagle but "a half-plucked turkey" (155). Within a few minutes, Fawkes "had become a fireball; it gave out a loud shriek and the next second there was nothing but a smouldering pile of ash on the floor" (155). As Dumbledore quickly explains to a young wizard – phoenixes "burst into flame when it is time for them to die and are reborn from the ashes" (155). This moment is called the Burning Day, like in Hesiod or Herodotus' descriptions. This connection, not directly highlighting the Greco-Roman origins, might prove Rowling's inspiration to create the character of Fawkes, Dumbledore's faithful pet, based on the 'original' myth.

This example would be the case of Rowling's interpretation of a relationship between a human and a pet, also widely discussed in HAS discourse (Haraway, 2008; DeMello, 2012). Dumbledore, 'the owner' of a phoenix, seems to understand that this relationship is not an ordinary one, especially when we acknowledge the fact that Fawkes and Sparky (Rowling, 2009: 80) are the only two 'domesticated' phoenixes in the diegetic world. Dumbledore says: "Fascinating creatures, phoenixes. They can carry immensely heavy loads, their tears have healing powers, and they make highly faithful pets" (Rowling, 1998: 155). As we read in *Fantastic Beasts...*, "Phoenix' song is magical: it is reputed to increase the courage of the pure of heart and to strike fear into the hearts of the impure." (Rowling, 2001: 32) Even though throughout the series phoenixes are called the wizards' pets, they are still treated with great respect and understanding. Their bond with humans is literally magical.

Phoenixes prove to be quite popular in texts for the youngest. One appears in Edith Nesbit's: *The Phoenix and the Carpet* (orig. 1904, 2017), following the first book in the trilogy *Five Children and It* (orig. 1902, 2004). It begins before Guy Fawkes Night (maybe it was an inspiration for Rowling to name Dumbledore's phoenix Fawkes), as the siblings get a new carpet, and in it a mystery egg. a phoenix hatches from it, "a fabulous bird of antiquity" (19) and he takes the children on many adventures on the carpet that only the bird understands. Nesbit's phoenix has his own

agency, he is arrogant and proud, yet not heartless. He also denies almost every piece of information that the children provide him with from the encyclopaedia about a phoenix (21), in a way rejecting the ancient heritage described in human books. And, certainly, he is not a pet.

Another example of a phoenix is present in the *My Little Pony* series (creat. Faust, 2010-2019). In a *Bird in the Hoof* (S01E22) the phoenix is a sick, featherless, small bird, owned by Princess Celestia, the ruler of Equestria. She explicitly calls the creature her pet, with the name Philomena, and keeps her in a golden cage. After Fluttershy (a sensitive and shy pony that can take care of and bond with all the monsters) tries to bring the bird back to hell, Philomena bursts into ashes and comes back to life. It is interesting that here too, just like in the Harry Potter series, a phoenix is owned by somebody in authority and becomes a symbol of power, at the same time being under the power of its owner.

Proof of this unusual connection between Harry and Fawkes is presented at the end of the second book of the series. When Harry encounters danger posed by Tom Riddle (memory of Lord Voldemort), his loyalty to Dumbledore is rewarded by Fawkes's presence and help. Tom's pet, the Basilisk,[88] a legendary creature that once served the great ancestor of Voldemort, follows his master's orders and tries to kill Harry. When Fawkes and the Basilisk fight, we observe two opposite human–pet relationships. While the phoenix chooses to help Harry because of his act of loyalty, Basilisk follows the orders of his master and therefore is destined to fail. The rules of the diegetic world makes its success impossible as only the use of 'good' magic (here – based on loyalty) determines a happy ending, and that is developed by such feelings and emotions like love, courage, loyalty and friendship. What is more, the way in which Voldemort treats his pet (as many people do in reality) is far removed from these noble feelings. Fawkes helps Harry because of his fidelity towards Dumbledore, not because of the magical bond between them. In this relationship, the roles of the pet and the owner (here represented by Fawkes) are actually reversed. Harry becomes Dumbledore's pet and is rewarded thanks to his loyalty. The magical bond between Dumbledore and Fawkes expands. Now Harry receives gifts that previously were reserved only for the owner and the pet, and therefore becomes a pet himself. How this new relationship developed may be observed throughout the series, especially in the last two books of the septalogy (which is, however, material for a separate study).

Another creature that Harry and his friends meet – also, inspired by classical antiquity – is the three-headed dog, Cerberus. In *The Philosopher's Stone* (Rowling, 1997), when the children escape Filch and his cat Mrs. Norris

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[88]   In *Natural History* Pilny the Elder highlighted the fact that Basilisk had "a bright white marking on the head like a sort of diadem," presenting him as a royal animal (trans. Rackham, ed. 2015: 57).

(treated by her owner almost like a human, even a partner), they end up in the forbidden corridor, where a dog guards the entrance to Hogwart's underground.

> They were looking straight into the eyes of a monstrous dog, a dog which filled the whole space between ceiling and floor. It had three heads. Three pairs of rolling, mad eyes; three noses, twitching and quivering in their direction; three drooling mouths, saliva hanging in slippery ropes from yellowish fangs. (119)

From now on Harry, Ron and Hermione do not dare go back and investigate what Fluffy was actually guarding. The topic of the mythical monster comes back when Harry spots Snape's wound on the professor's leg and discovers that the potion master has gone to the third floor. When they tell Hagrid about their discovery:

> 'How do you know about Fluffy?' he said.
> 'Fluffy?'
> 'Yeah – he's mine – bought him off a Greek chappie I met in the pub las' year. I lent him to Dumbledore do guard the-' (141)

... Philosopher's Stone, as we later found out. The three-headed dog, bought from a Greek man, which protects the entrance to the underground is a clear association with classical mythology and Cerberus. Although perceived by students as a monster, for Hagrid he is a pet that does not differ much from his 'normal' dog Fang.

The mythological origin of Fluffy is quite direct and obvious. In Greek mythology Cerberus was a three-headed dog with a snake for its tail or mane. He guarded the entrance to Hades and was once put to sleep by a beautiful melody played by Orpheus. He quite often appears in youth culture, sometimes as danger, Hades/Devil's pet,[89] sometimes as a rather funny dog.[90] Fluffy from Rowling's saga guards the entrance to Hogwarts' underground where the Philosopher's Stone is hidden, and it also can be put to sleep only by music. Cerberus has not been particularly developed as a character by Rowling. However, as Groves (2017) observes,

> Cerberus, as Fluffy, is a threshold guardian (Boll, 2013: 91) and he symbolises the absolute nature of death and the unknowability of what lies beyond the grave. Cerberus allows people to enter the underworld, but vigilance of his six eyes and the violence of his three slavering mouths, that none can get past him and back into the light. (34)

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[89] In Spielberg's *Animaniacs: Hot, Bothered, and Bedevilled* (S01E30) Cerberus is 'nice' only to his master.
[90] In Faust's *My Little Pony* series, in the episode: *It's About Time* (S02E20) the first scary beast turns out to be just a giant dog ready to play fetch, loving his belly being rubbed).

Fluffy is viewed by other characters as a 'monstrous pet' – used as a guard-dog, not a companion. Here, the mythological connection seems to be more important for Rowling than a potential tool in her animal discourse. This hypothesis may be supported by Cerberus's absence in Rowling's bestiary.

Presenting Cerberus as a pet is a popular motif in youth culture. More adorable than in the case of Fluffy would be the one appearing in *Say Cheese, Medusa!* by Kate McMullan (2012). Here Hades, the narrator, describes his friend as follows:

> So I was glad to see my loyal dog Cerberus waiting for me just inside the Gates. When he saw my chariot coming, he ran to greet me. "Whoa, Harley! Whoa, Davidson!" I called. They stopped, and Cerbie leaped into ma lap and gave me the old tripe licking. "Yes, you're my good old, boy, boy, boy." (55)

A slightly different depiction appears in Michał Rusinek's bestiary (2016). The author begins his poem with the notion that Cerberus is not very popular on Facebook nor Twitter. He presumably has bad manners, does not know any grammar, snores loudly and takes part in the Harry Potter series under the name Fluffy (pl.: "Puszek"; 18–19). Those are just rumours, some of which are true, some not, but one thing is certain – Cerberus definitely exists, if not in the real world, then in mainstream media.

Hagrid in Between

Rubeus Hagrid, a half-giant, half-wizard,[91] is actually one of the first 'mythical beasts' that we encounter in the series. In *The Philosopher's Stone* (1997) Rowling gives his description that suits both his look and his behaviour, which will not change throughout the series.

> He [Hagrid] was almost twice as tall as a normal man and at least five times as wide. He looked simply **too big to be allowed,** and **so wild** – long tangles of bushy black hair and beard hid most of his face, he had hands the size of trash can lids, and his feet in their leather boots were like baby dolphins. In his vast, muscular arms he was holding a bundle of blankets. [...]
> 'Could I – could I say good-bye to him, sir?' asked Hagrid. He bent his great, shaggy head over Harry and gave him what must have been a very scratchy, whiskery kiss. Then, suddenly, Hagrid let out a howl like a wounded dog. (16–17, emphasis added)

The very first encounter with Hagrid might evoke a feeling of him being a big, yet harmless animal, most likely – a dog, culturally recognised as

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[91]   Hagrid had a giant mother and a giant half-brother.

a symbol of faithfulness and devotion (Ferguson 1961: 15; Choron, 2005: 9).[92] Later on, when he picks Harry up from the house in the middle of the sea to take him to Hogwarts, we get another, close-up description of Hagrid:

> A giant of a man was standing in the doorway. His face was almost completely hidden by a long, shaggy mane of hair and a wild, tangled beard, but you could make out his eyes, glinting like black beetles under all the hair (39)

His monstrosity is built almost every time upon the principle of contradiction: a giant man with 'warm,' animalistic traits: dolphin boots, a dog howl, beetle eyes... His enormous posture is most likely associated with warmth and strength rather than with danger. Hagrid is an embodiment of loyalty and kindness, traits that are strange to 'real' giants, popularised on the basis of antiquity.

As Katrin Berndt (2011) notices, Hagrid's wild hair and beard "denote his occupation as gamekeeper and his half-giant status, and announce his admiration of monstrous, that is untamed creatures" (163). Although his appearance might be frightening, Hagrid's personality is far from being threatening or scary. Throughout the series he proved many times that he was nothing more than a caring and loyal friend, sensitive, even if thin-skinned, especially when it comes to 'animals' or 'animal-like' creatures. At the same time, he is someone in between: not only because of his gigantic origins, but also because of his place in the world of magic.

In the Harry Potter universe, giants are less intelligent than wizards, but they have their own language and customs, they can learn human languages and know how to read, and even use magic, although their favourite and apparently basic occupation is to kill – it does not matter whether the victims are from outside or within their own circle. Due to this they are feared and hated by the wizard community, although some of them are able to cooperate with humans. Due to this connotation, Hagrid (and Madame Maxime[93]) does not want to be associated with his ancestors, even though many people already know his family roots. As a half-giant, he is automatically excluded and becomes 'the monster.' In the second book, Tom Riddle says that Hagrid, and not anybody else, will be blamed for the death of a student (Rowling, 1999: 73). Hagrid is often treated with contempt and lack of respect by other wizards and witches. One might say that in the Wizarding World, Hagrid is some kind

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[92] Hagrid is also the only character who owns a dog. Another character related to a dog would be Sirius Black, a friend of Harry Potter's family, who embodied loyalty, and could transform himself into a dog.
[93] We meet Olympe Maxime in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. Just like Hagrid, Maxime is half-giantess, and also the headmistress of one of the schools participating in the Triwizard Tournament, Beauxbatons Academy of Magic.

of a monster: a half-giant, 'weirdo,' squib, and outsider. He is excluded from both the human and the giant community. As 'a monster,' he does not belong anywhere, so he has to stay 'in between.'

From the very beginning of the series, Hagrid treats magical creatures with great love and understanding. In the third book, he becomes the Care of Magical Creatures teacher. For him every 'terrifying monster' was an 'interesting creature' (Rowling, 1999: 162). Backshall (2018) writes that "Hagrid shares this innate affinity with wild creatures" (192). He is the one who is able to tame dragons, three-headed dogs, hippogriffs; take care of flying horses and be friends to gigantic spiders. He is maybe the only person who is tolerated by most of the creatures in the Forbidden Forest. There is also something symbolic in placing Hagrid's Hut at the edge of the Forbidden Forest, between two worlds: wild space with dangerous and misunderstood magical creatures and the 'civilised' world of wizards. Thanks to Hagrid, the main characters (and also readers) have an opportunity to get to know both of these worlds and at least try to change the approach of wizards towards magical 'animals.' Many aspects of Hagrid's character point to his intersectional potential and shows how intersectionality – embodied in the 'monstrous' creature – can enrich the world of magic that is not so magical after all.

By creating this character, Rowling may have wanted to show her future readers that however crazy it might be (Hagrid is not the most reasonable person), caring for animals only proves that one is a good person who is able to show empathy and understand those who are mostly misunderstood and feared, much like Hagrid himself.

Is Magic Might?

In the fifth book, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (Rowling, 2003), when Harry is on the way to a hearing at the Ministry of Magic, he notices a fountain halfway down the hall:

> A group of golden statues [...] stood in the middle of a circular pool. Tallest of them all was a noble-looking wizard with his wand pointing straight up in the air. Grouped around him were a beautiful witch, a centaur, a goblin and a house-elf. The last three were all looking adoringly up at the witch and wizard. (117)

When Harry leaves the facility, he takes a closer look at the statues:

> He looked up into the handsome wizard's face, but close-to Harry thought he looked rather weak and foolish. The witch was wearing a vapid smile like a beauty contestant, and from what Harry knew of goblins and centaurs, they were most unlikely to be caught staring so soppily at humans of any description. (142)

As he noticed, the hierarchy represented by the fountain that stood in the centre of the magical world's political life is a falsehood. Centaurs would never look at wizards with admiration – at this point, it would be rather with disgust and anger (see Chapter V).

In the last book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (Rowling, 2007), the fountain is replaced by a monument: a witch and wizard sitting on the thrones made out of muggles, with no other magical creatures around them, with the inscription MAGIC IS MIGHT (198–199). In both cases, these monuments represent the actual outlook of the current authorities on the wizard's place in society which (again – in both cases) situates them in the highest position. Rowling invites us to take a closer look – just like Harry did – at what the authorities represent and compare this representation with the knowledge gained from the Forbidden Forest. There is no doubt that what Rowling states in *Fantastic Beasts* (2001) is not just a playful treatment of the bestiary conventions, a reflection on the fun she had while creating yet another magical catalogue of beasts. Her awareness of literary tradition in the humanities leads to reading the whole *Harry Potter* series in a completely different context. Although not everything that appears in the series can be considered pro-animal, she tries to convey some kind of message, as she often does on an everyday basis.[94]

As Jen Harrison (2018) highlights:

> By frequently bringing human subjects into engagement with species that resist classification as either human or animal, Rowing's series calls into question not merely the validity of the hierarchical system [...] but also the possibility of any system of classification at all. Particularly in light of the 2016 film version of Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them, the question of any stable human ontology in a subjectivity-shattering magical environment is a central theme in these stories, inviting readers and audiences to consider whether liberal humanist control is as illusory in the real world as it so obviously is in the magical one. (328–329)

Rowling did quite the opposite to what was practiced by many children's literature writers in the past. Instead of anthropomorphising 'animals,' she gives them their own voice, and therefore the right to exist in the community. Her work contributes to human–animal studies discourse in children's literature. However, she vividly puts some creatures above others, as, for example, there is no case of veganism or vegetarianism in the magical world. At the same time, she also acknowledges that there is a very thin line between human and beast which has also been pointed

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[94] Rowling is a philanthropist. She supports many charities, such as: Gingerbread (One Parent Families) or the Multiple Sclerosis Society. She also founded the Children's High Level Group in 2005.

out by Adam Łukaszewicz (2011). In his opinion, "[a]ll animals are equal, but some animals are truly beasts. The human beast is much more beastly that other beasts" (154). Rowling incorporates into her novels a discussion about animals as a parallel strand to her defence of all who are different.

Rowling's ideas of monstrous animals might reflect the actual situation of nonhuman creatures of our world. However, their 'fantastic' status allows the potential reader to apply those figures to their own ideas of neglect and social exclusion, as they function as metaphors. As Noel Chevalier (2005) writes:

> [...] the fact that the wizard press is so easily controlled by the Ministry allows Rowling to blend Harry's personal story with a wider critique of systems of authority that define the wizarding world and to raise issues of political justice within a society defined by such rigid authoritarianism. (400)

This applies of course to the magical beasts, whose cases were explored more precisely in *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (the movie, 2016) but also highlights the fact how oppressive wizarding politics actually was. Chevalier (2005) also claims that Rowling settled the political events of the Harry Potter world in the context of the 'real' one that took place in Britain in the '80s and '90s, for example, Voldemort would be a Thatcher, etc. (401) which strengthens the value and relevance of Rowling's story to contemporary world issues. Children's culture becomes the mirror of the contemporary world, and maybe thanks to its 'fantastic' status, it allows the reader to see it even more clearly than usual.

In conclusion I would like to quote Chevalier once more, as he points out that:

> Dumbledore is also guilty of making what Rita Skeeter calls "controversial staff appointments" (Goblet of Fire 380). He does not seem to care that Hagrid is half giant, Lupin a werewolf, Firenze, Sybil Trelawney's replacement in book 5, a centaur, and Mad-Eye Moody largely discredited as "jinx-happy" and paranoid. Cornelius Fudge outlines this at the end of Goblet of Fire (615). (405)

According to Chevalier's description, the political world of magic has been compromised. It is no longer about wild beasts that can harm humans. It is about being different and not compatible with the idea of a 'normal wizard,' which already sounds oxymoronic. Monstrous animals become signs of exclusion in a straightforward way. And classical mythology sometimes deepens their creation of truly magnificent and meaningful creatures.
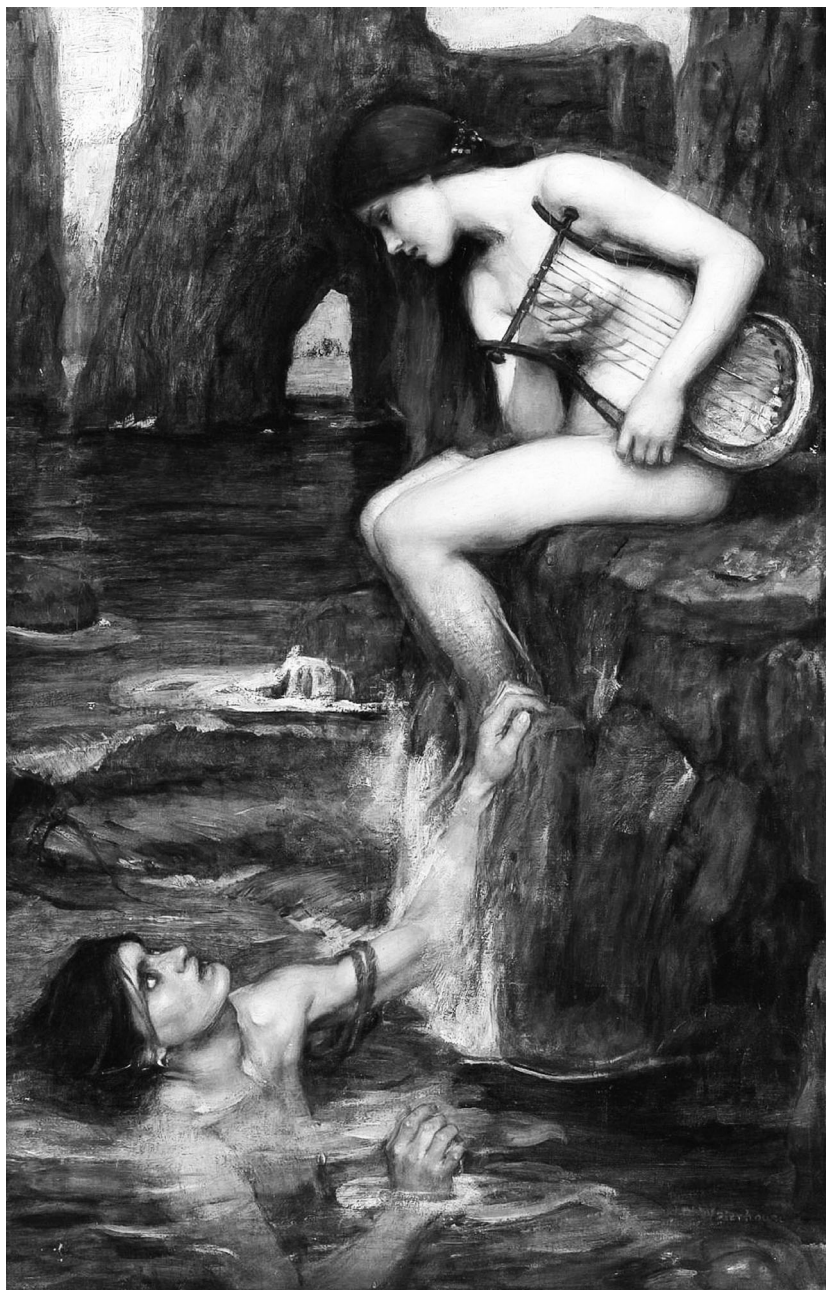
CHAPTER III:
THE MONSTROUS GENDER

Figure 3. The siren — a female monster and man's gaze

The view is superb, with the help of the proper perspective.
Zbigniew Herbert, *The Sacrifice of Iphigenia*, trans. Carpenter, orig. 1957, 2001: 221.

Does a Monster Have a Gender?

The monster in itself is a rejection of categorisation, a departure from commonly accepted social norms, a form of destabilisation in a world celebrating normativity. The idea of a monster, just as the idea of gender, is an embodiment of a cognitive paradox: the subject's characteristic in our perception might collide with the idea of the subject forced on us by culture, and our own prejudices: what should or should not be defined as a woman or a man, a human or a monster. Concepts of monstrosity and gender are closely connected, also with the phenomenon of performance:[95] presenting oneself on the cultural scene, being put on display in order to be identified within social categories. However, the use of social categories always results in some form of exclusion that concerns those individuals who do not fit into existing patterns. This exclusion refers to all the monsters analysed in this book, but maybe especially to those introduced in this chapter.

In *Gender Trouble* (2018), Judith Butler uses the term "incarnations of gender," claiming that there is no one definite realisation of gender in one subject, but we face an unlimited variety of gender realisations (21). The same assertion applies to teratology: **there is no one monster – just incarnations of monstrosity**. A monster and gender destabilise the categories we commonly use and are accustomed to. They question the order and allow us to deconstruct, or sometimes even reject, the unnecessary rules of categorisation in general. Therefore, there is a obligation of including gender discourse in the dispute concerning signs of exclusion.

Gender is not something given to someone permanently. It is a fluent cultural construct a subject identifies itself with, and/or is assigned to by external influences, e.g. society. Following Butler's (1990) idea that "the unity of the subject is [...] already potentially contested by the distinction that permits of gender as a multiple interpretation of sex" (6), it might be claimed that just like monsters, gender ought to be perceived as a shapeshifting construct. As Beverly Lyon Clark (2000) points out, "[n]ot all women and girls [nor men and boys – AM] enact a single, biologically determined way of writing or responding – gender is not essential but rather is constructed in contradictory ways both in different people and

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[95] On gender performativity, see Butler, 2018: 19–20.

within individuals" (4). Even more so, gender should be considered fluent and unstable in reference to an adolescent, a not yet fully formed adult. That is also underlined by Clark, who recalls Jacqueline Rose raising the issue of constructing childhood by adults, and how "adults often conflate the origins of language, sexuality, and childhood" (4). As Clark concludes, "[b]oth literature for young children and literature for adolescents reveal a culture's attitude toward the young and its cultural construction of youth, not to mention its key values" (5). It obliges us to even see adolescence as a truly 'monstrous' period in humans life, which is sometimes depicted in texts for young people (see Chapter VI).

Examples of monsters representing certain kinds of gender, or rather being on a spectrum of gender, have the potential to help young people who are growing up to understand the intricacies of the human body and sexual identity. What is more, mythological elements of stories analysed in this chapter might include some threads with primal signs,[96] highlighting the problems concerning the perception of gender by society and identifying with it in ancient times.[97] In the article from 1993 written by Carole M. Kortenhaus and Jack Demarest on gender in children's literature we read:

> Children in every culture learn to adopt certain roles and behaviors as part of the socialization process. Many of these behavioral roles are based on identification with a particular sex. The development of gender role identity is important to children's self-perception, and it influences the way children are treated by adults and peers, affecting the expectations that others have for their behavior. The gender identity of most children is shaped by the universally shared beliefs about gender roles that are held by their society. These shared beliefs often take the form of oversimplified gender role stereotypes [...] Given this long-term influence of books, there can be no doubt that the characters portrayed in children's literature mold a child's conception of socially accepted roles and values, and indicate how males and females are supposed to act. (219–220)

The authors of the article point to the not necessarily didactic function of children's literature but underline that children's literature has a great

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[96] It is not a coincidence that Sigmund Freud (Oedipus complex) or Carl Gustav Jung (broadly, in a different manner) took a lot of metaphors from Greek and Roman mythology to describe their patients' cases (Dowden, 2005: 23).

[97] Aristotle (trans. Peck, ed. 1990), in the *Generation of Animals*, writes: "They differ in their *logos*, because the male is that which has the power to generate in another [...] while the female is that which can generate in itself." (13) For the philosopher a woman was associated with fertility and nature, man – with control over it. Wieczorkiewicz (2009) claims that Aristotle saw in a woman some sort of disturbance (21). The thought of men's superiority over women also appears in his other works (inter alia: *Politics*). His views are often perceived as contrary to Plato, who was open to including women into mainstream discourse.

impact on shaping young people's minds and personalities. They also show what a major influence on young minds culture has in general. Opinions and strong statements[98] not only influence people but very often prevent their healthy psychological development and make it impossible to shape subjectivity. Examples of such gender selection are presented by Kortenhaus and Demarest in the following paragraph:

> In children's literature, males typically are portrayed as competent and achievement oriented, while the image of females is that they are limited in what they do, and less competent in their ability to accomplish things. Female characters are involved in few of the activities and assigned few of the characteristics or goals that are accorded prestige and esteem in our society, even though such goals and activities are pursued and achieved daily by a majority of women in the business and professional world. (220–221)

Those views were expressed in 1993 and certainly the phenomenon of gender today, as being very dynamic, has changed.[99] Nevertheless, Donna Ferguson (2018), in her article "Must monsters always be male? Huge gender bias revealed in children's books" (*The Guardian*, online), notes that in children's literature, anthropomorphic male figures – dragons, bears or tigers – are usually presented as powerful, wild and potentially dangerous beasts, while female figures are usually smaller and have a milder disposition: rabbits, cats or insects. With a similar approach to research,[100] conclusions are disturbingly similar. Kortenhaus and Demarest (1993) claimed that: "[...] males predominated in situations with active mastery themes (cleverness, adventure, and earning money), while females predominated in situations with 'second-sex' themes (passivity, victimisation, and goal constriction)" (221). Over two decades later, we read in Ferguson's (2018) article:

> Male characters are twice as likely to take leading roles in children's picture books and are given far more speaking parts than females, according to Observer research that shines a spotlight on the casual sexism apparently inherent in young children's reading material. In-depth analysis of the 100 most popular children's picture books of 2017, carried out by this paper with market research company Nielsen, reveals the majority are dominated by male characters, often in stereotypically masculine roles, while female characters are missing from a fifth of the books ranked.

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[98]   Often forced by politics and religion.
[99]   Supposedly, in the '90s there was a notable "trend of decreasing sexism in children's picture books" (Kortenhaus, Demarest, 1993: 229).
[100]   Numerous picture books were analysed by Kortenhaus and Demarest, as well in the study recalled by Ferguson.

Gender balance and democracy in children's culture (or in culture in general), as Ferguson shows, is far from ideal. Even if it constantly changes in popular culture, texts for young people are still full of stereotyping and gender inequality. Nonetheless, researchers on gender in children's culture see hope for future generations. As Clark (2001) writes in the introduction to the book on gender in children's literature and culture:

> Study of children's literature and culture raises important questions about the definition of high culture, the social construction of childhood, a text's construction of its readers or a commodity's construction of its consumers, censorship and self-censorship, textual structures in mixed media, and the core texts that carry a culture's values. (1)

Although I oppose such a differentiation of culture,[101] it is worth observing that Clark suggests the importance of children's cultural role in creating popular ideas on certain issues, such as gender and gender models. A similar mechanism would also apply to mythological monsters appearing in works for young people, representing the variety of gender manifestations.

Monsters often signify conflicted features and emotions. Female monsters with animal parts, such as sirens, gorgons and harpies, are difficult to define as innocent or defenceless. As Jane Caputi (2004), a researcher of gender and mythology, states, the myth of the goddess/monster is realised in their animals, while at the same time she emphasises the qualities we associate with animals, such as intuition, instinct, sexuality and predation (14). This is a completely different set of characteristics than those mentioned by Ferguson. Such an image of a female monster can potentially constitute an 'improved' model of femininity than those based on the delicacy or humility of the protagonists. The 'animalism' of female monsters appears to be a very attractive category, showing the features of a character, perhaps insignificant at first glance. A similar mechanism of decoding the gender of a monster would also apply to male characters, very often depicted as strong, fearless creatures that do not show their 'soft side.'

This chapter aims to show how different gender can be perceived, how many types of it we encounter in children's culture and what roles are played in it by Graeco-Roman mythology. Even though the depictions of women in mythology seem 'promising,'[102] it is worth remembering that, as Marta Weigle (1982) acknowledges:

> As generally understood and undertaken, mythology – the study of sacred symbols, texts, rites, and their dynamic expression in human psyches and

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[101] 'High' and 'low' – see Introduction.
[102] Promising in terms of varieties and complexity.

societies – concerns men's myths and rituals. Most extant documents, field data, and interpretations come from male scribes, scholars, artists, and "informants." Thus we know a fair amount about women in mythology, about the female figures who people men's narrative, enactments, philosophies and analyses, and almost nothing about women and mythology, or women's mythologies – the stories they recount among themselves and in the company of young children, the rituals they perform, and their elaboration, exegesis, and evaluation of their own and men's profoundly moving and significant symbolic expressions. (vii)

Even though we might consider female monsters to be representations of the feminine, it is always crucial to acknowledge that those are still men's perspectives on womanhood.[103] As the issue of 'manliness' appears to be vital in such an analysis, I elaborate on it in the following part which opens the discussion on mythical and monstrous gender.

The Monstrous Male

> *Theseus killer of the innocent Minotaur*
> *the one who fathomed the labyrinth with a prissy ball of yarn*
> *a fraud full of ruses without principle or vision of the future.*
>
> Zbigniew Herbert, *Damastes Nicknamed Procrustes Speaks*,
> trans. Valles, orig. 1983, 2007.[104]

Monsters are not only the nonhuman animals presented in the previous chapter. The term 'monstrosity' also covers infamous aspects of humanity. Discussing male monstrosity, it is worth underlining that in many cases it lies not within the physical appearance of characters, but notably in their 'heroic' actions. They are also often men[105] and they make monsters out of women, to mention only Horace who described Cleopatra as a 'fatale monstrum' (Marciniak, 2020: 31). Mythological heroes are very often unreflectively considered to be 'good' characters, protagonists of myths, chosen by the gods to defeat evil.[106] But as it turns out, in most cases the men presented in myths (not only heroes, but gods as well) can be violent and cruel, and not always smart or sincere. The most valued features in men's stories are power and a godly status, the ability to defeat dangerous beasts and prove their courage. Very often their not so noble behaviours are justified,[107] even glorified since they often suffer great consequences.

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[103]   Not only in sources but also in studies on mythology and mythological dictionaries. For more information see Bibliography.
[104]   Herbert, 2018: 478. Cited also by Katarzyna Marciniak, 2018: 526.
[105]   If not always, as they are the 'authors' of mythologies.
[106]   Ultimately, they become 'role models' (Brazouski, Klatt, 1994: 5).
[107]   Just like Hercules killing his family because of the madness sent on him by Hera.

While women are most often punished for their pride, being beautiful, curious or independent, men are rewarded for murder and recklessness. Even though such observations might seem superficial and one-sided, they often find their place in contemporary texts, as well as in the political sphere, dominated by men.

Classical culture has a great impact on right-wing American politics (Bloxham, 2018). There is no surprise then when Donna Zuckerburg (2018) begins her book on misogyny and classics with the recollection of activities pursued by the white nationalist group Identity Evropa and their seemingly harmless poster manifestoes (most usually presenting ancient monuments of men). Commenting on this we read:

> In the less tangible world of the internet, far-right communities ideologically aligned with Identity Evropa have increasingly been using artefacts, texts, and historic figures evocative of ancient Greece and Rome to lend cultural weight to their reactionary vision of ideal white masculinity. (1)

That would probably be reason enough to include her argument here. This is not only because of gender roles and men's domination forced by such organisations but also because of the 'white' aspect of Identity Evropa and its racist implications (see Chapter V). However, what Zuckerburg writes next appears even more 'handy' and accurate for my analysis:

> These online communities go by many names – the Alt-Right, the manosphere, Men Going Their Own Way, pickup artists – and exist under the larger umbrella of what is known as the Red Pill, a group of men connected by common resentments against women, immigrants, people of color, and the liberal elite. (1)

Zuckerburg's observation only confirms the idea presented in the first part of this work: white privileged men are the opposite front for all modern mythical monsters (see Chapter I). For her, social media is the main platform of misogynists[108] to not only communicate within their groups but also to attack other people on cyberspace, and that includes the usage of Greek and Roman antiquity (3), as this tradition "holds particular cultural significance for them" (4). This is especially evident in the United States, where classical tradition is threatened by the "politically correct establishment" and "social justice warriors" (4). It is to be protected by all means, as it is clearly right-wing, conservative parties' great heritage that they strongly identify with.

What is also vital in the discussion is the fact that Zuckerberg encourages everyone interested in classic and social justice to look closely

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[108]   Within organizations such as Red Pill, but also political parties, etc.

at this trend, "which has the potential to reshape what ancient Greece and Rome mean in the twenty-first century while simultaneously promoting dangerous and discriminatory views about gender and race" (5). One of the reasons would be that "the man of the manosphere see their own misogyny reflected back at them, theorised, and celebrated in ancient literature" (6). This claim would also suit many analyses of mythological gods, heroes, and male monsters who doubtlessly would be considered 'role models' for young men and women of the 21st century.

This phenomenon would be, allegedly, the effect of the impact of harmful gender patterns perpetuated by culture and to a certain extent based on the classical tradition. For centuries, children's culture taught boys (and very often still does) to hunt, destroy, build, be naughty, dirty, and to finally become 'a real man' with a wife, children, house and a car in the 20th and 21st centuries (Wannamaker, 2008: 14–15).[109] There is no place for crying or being vulnerable, caring for animals, tidying up rooms, not to mention wearing dresses. These are things that only girls are allowed to do. Annette Wannamaker makes a crucial statement regarding children's literature, in particular, literature read by boys:

> Boys should be reading texts that they enjoy and that encourage literacy. Boys should be reading texts that feature a wide array of characters that represent various ethnicities, races, nationalities, sexualities, and, most important, a wide range of ways of being male. They should be reading texts that feature female protagonists. They should be reading rich and varied literary works form a range of periods and genres. They should be reading texts featuring males who are nonviolent, sensitive, tolerant, and wise, not only those depicting males who are violent, stoic, and individualistic. (15)

By stating so, Wannamaker explicitly points out all the things that are 'wrong' with children's literature, but maybe instead of using the phrase 'boys should read' she should have used: 'the authors should write.' However, as Wannamaker also accurately points out, boys do read many different literary texts, but those they actually read are also considered to be a subgenre and often not taken into account (15). Some of those examples of sub literature (television programs, comic books),[110] if not all, would be categorised as products of popular culture. Hence, the examination of such examples, connected to Graeco-Roman mythology, would be important to define the monstrous masculinity of children's culture.

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[109]   Also on masculinity in children's fiction see Stephens, 2002.

[110]   "[...] most of the texts that boys enjoy are precisely those texts that most repulse many adults who want children to read literature of quality. Even when literary scholars disagree about what "literature of quality" might mean, most seem to agree that many boys are not reading it." Wannamaker, 2008: 16.

There was a certain set of skills that young boys need to obtain to become 'real men': achieve certain levels of greatness in philosophy, at war, in politics. A lot of the qualities assigned to men, contained in mythology and especially in the characters of heroes, can be perceived as signs of monstrosity and exclusion. There are two examples I would like to recall and analyse. The first one is probably the most famous 'monstrous' hero, Heracles, and is a separate case of a monstrous male. The second is the myth of Theseus, together with the Minotaur in its tangled story, where concepts of monstrosity and manliness, are, in my viewing, the main topic of this myth.

A Parody of Manliness: Hercules as a Monstrous Superhero[111]

Pierre Grimal (2008: 128), as well as Jan Parandowski (1992: 152), claims in accordance that Heracles (Hercules) is the most popular hero of classical mythology.[112] The French mythographer distinguishes three groups of texts related to this character: "1. a cycle of twelve labours, 2. achievements independent of the previous cycle, including expeditions undertaken by the hero and his army,[113] 3. secondary adventures that he had during the execution of the works" (Grimal, 2008: 128). In one version of the myth, the hero is called Alcides and is the son of Amphitryon and Alcmene (128). However, the name Heracles (or from the Greek 'Fame of Hera'), given to the strongman by Pythia, has remained with him until today (128). In later variants, Heracles' father was Zeus, who deceived Alcmene. Looking like the woman's husband, he begat with her semi-godly child. Hera, on the other hand, fed the infant with her breast[114] because it was "a condition under which the hero could achieve immortality" (128). After the infant started sucking her breasts aggressively and painfully, Hera rejected the child and spurt her milk into the sky, and that is how the Milky Way was created. According to Robert Graves (2011), at this moment the goddess was supposed to have screamed: "**The young monster!**" (452; emphasis added). Later, she also sent two serpents to kill the young hero, but he easily strangled the animals.

Accoding to the myth, after eighteen years of education,[115] covering both literature and music as well as archery, Herakles performed his first

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[111]   This part of the chapter is based on the article: *From Hero to Superhero, from a "Monster" to a Celebrity* (Mik, 2017a).
[112]   Christopher Dell (2018) states that Hercules "was for the ancient Greeks the very essence of manhood, fantastically strong, courageous and ingenious" (182).
[113]   While the works are mostly carried out by Heracles himself, possibly with his nephew, Iolaos.
[114]   She was tricked into doing so.
[115]   According to Greek classical principles, he had the greatest teachers (Graves, 2011: 454).

great deed: he killed a lion from the Cithaeron mountains (Grimal, 2008: 129). One of his subsequent achievements was the defence of Thebes against invaders, for which he received a royal daughter, Megara, as a reward. His wife gave the man numerous offspring, which Heracles himself was soon to throw into a fire (129). The murders he committed[116] are explained by mythographers as being due to the madness sent on the strongman by Hera (129). The twelve labours of Heracles were interpreted in various ways: on the one hand, as a way of saving humanity from suffering, and on the other hand, as penance for the murder of his children, whom the hero was supposed to guarantee immortality (130).

According to Grimal, "these explanations come from the Greek reflection on the myth and tell of the need for a moral evaluation of the hero's deeds, who was willingly presented as the embodiment of righteousness" (130). The content of myths has changed many times due to the human desire to 'save' the impeccable nature of Heracles and his honesty (131). Heracles' death is also described in various variants in different ways. The mighty man was to be poisoned by Dejanira (second wife), who gave him a robe soaked in a deadly liquid (blood of the centaur Nessos). When Heracles was burning at the stake,[117] Zeus allegedly fired a bolt of lightning from the sky and the hero was taken to heaven in a cloud. At Olympus, he reconciled himself with Hera, and during the ceremony, according to this myth's variant, "the scene of the birth of the hero from the goddess's womb was played out." (138) Thus, after many hardships, Heracles received the award: immortality and eternal life among the gods.

Heracles is linked to a number of beasts: Nemean Lion, Lernaean Hydra, Cretan Bull, etc. For one, as he wore a lion skin, he could be depicted as half-animal, half-man: a hybrid monster. On many levels, he becomes a monster, either as a half-god, an unbelievably strong man, killer of the beasts, or a madman. His depictions certainly have changed in popular culture dedicated to children. The next part of the analysis will present his transformation in probably one of the most popular texts featuring Heracles.

In youth culture, the main motif from classical mythology connected with Heracles is his strength and famous killing skills. John Harris (2005) in *Strong Stuff: Heracles and his Labours* retells the well-known myth as a parody of Heracles' heroism and not so glamorous achievements. Each of the twelve labours is accompanied by an assignment, which is: "Bring them back," "Get rid of them," "Kill it" (pages not numbered). In this work, the hero is imagined as a merciless killer that does not reflect much on his actions. However, there are also texts that add some new features

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[116]   Including, among others, the killing of his chosen one and his own father, Amphitryon.
[117]   Set on fire by Philoctetes, the only witness to his death.

of Heracles that it lacked in the 'original' story. And those definitely appear in *Hercules* by Walt Disney (dir. Clements, Musker, 1997).

The film is not simply an adaptation of a myth or a corpus of Greek myths because of the shifts in the plot and the fairy-tale convention used by animation creators. What we are dealing with here is rather an update of the myth, and the 'new' way of conveying it may prove that the narration has been adapted to the needs of the American society of the 1990s. Even though the actual texts concerning a given myth have been changed, their function seems to be very similar.

Joseph Campbell (2017), among others, wrote about the functions of myths, bringing the heroic scheme of action to the so-called monomyth. According to the researcher:

> [....] the hero's journey [...] always follows a pattern blurred in [...] the core of the myth, encompassing three stages: moving away from the world, reaching the source of life and a life-supporting return. (37)

All these stages of the journey can be found in Disney's *Hercules*. The monomythic narration can be carried out according to the above scheme, regardless of whether we are dealing with an ancient text or a contemporary work of popular culture. The re-telling of the myth serves to meet social needs. The translation of myth into the language of film itself is called neo-mythologization. It would be characterised by reaching for supernatural elements in the world of extreme rationalism and be an expression of human desire to maintain the sanctity of myths (Pop, 2013: 13). Films thus become tools for teaching mythology (14), although it is not, of course, a matter of simply conveying the content of certain plots.

Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence have developed a narrative schema based on the monomyth theory called 'American monomyth,' which refers to the history of comic superheroes (Ciołkiewicz, 2013: 87). According to the researchers, the basic difference between these models is that "the former is based on the scheme of the rite of transition, while the latter is based on the scheme of the story of salvation" (98). It is worth stressing that in reference to Disney's *Hercules*, both elements function in parallel: the rite of passage[118] and salvation.[119] Moreover, it must be stressed that the view put forward by researchers that a superhero is always an isolated character does not correspond to the narrative scheme of the animation. Yes, at the beginning the hero is excluded by the community, but later it is fully assimilated. Thus, an interpretation of the film from the perspective of both models seems justified.

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[118]   Which can be regarded as passing through the protagonist of the Styx.
[119]   Here: communities from the invasion of titans, liberated by the film antagonist.

The myth about Heracles is told in the typical Disney fairy-tale film convention (Konieczna, 2005: 52). Its presence signals the very beginning of the film. The story is told by nine muses in a way that brings them closer to gospel singers. The divine singers intercept the narrative, led in a subdued way by the 'classic' male narrator who opens the story of the hero in the following way:

> Long ago, in the faraway land of ancient Greece, there was a golden age of powerful gods and extraordinary heroes. And the greatest and strongest of all these heroes was the mighty Hercules.
> But what is the measure of a true hero? Ah, that is what our story is...

At this point, the woman's voice interrupts the story with the words: "Will you listen to him? He's makin' the story sound like some Greek tragedy." The second muse also responses: "Lighten up, dude." Even after that, when the proper 'myth' will begin, we get a signal from the creators that it will not be a story perhaps known to the audience before watching the animation. It will be rather 'sung' by narrative-trafficking, an updated myth in the fairy-tale convention, with its typical happy ending.

The title protagonist, Hercules, can be interpreted as a Disney superhero of pop culture mythology (Zwierzchowski, 2003: 1 et seq.). Its resemblance to the Greek or Roman prototype is negligible, but the creators of this animation most probably did not want to recreate a figure known from the ancient tradition (68). Piotr Zwierzchowski shows that above all Disney wanted to tell a story about the seductive femme fatale and the innocent, adolescent boy,[120] which in itself was a reference to the American comedies of the 1930s and 40s (69). As the researcher proves, in the film image of Hercules we can find much more inspiration from works of popular culture, such as *Star Wars* or comic books about Superman (69). In my opinion, however, these allusions do not so much refer to specific characters or motifs, as to certain images of superheroism present in the Western world, with particular emphasis on the cultural constructs associated with it (69). This especially refers to those regarding the mythical monster.

We meet Hercules for the first time at a party organised on the occasion of his birth. In the animation, the protagonist is the son of Zeus and Hera, so he comes from a 'legitimate' relationship. This modification suggests that for the creators the priority values are those corresponding to the conservative American family (70). What is more, in the film, Hera does not send venomous snakes on her infant, as it happened in the popular variants of the mythical story. This is done by Hades, Zeus' brother and the main antagonist in the musical. Also, he planned to steal little

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[120]   Even though he was based on the pop culture image of a superhero.

Hercules stolen from Olympus by Pain and Panic, the servants of the Underworld, who play the roles of amusing supporting characters. The creatures feed the boy with a mysterious fluid from a bottle, which is a reversal of a situation from the Greek myths, where Hera fed Heracles with her breast. The protagonist is deprived of all his 'divinity' except for one attribute – superhuman strength. It allows him to defeat the snakes,[121] becomes the cause of his misery, and ultimately provides him with 'Hollywood' fame.

Hercules is found by a childless couple of farmers, Amphitryon and Alcmene, and thus gains new, 'human' parents, who raise him as their son. Amy M. Davies (2013) observes that, just like in the Disney *Tarzan* (1999, dir. Buck, Lima), which was made two years later, here we observe a degradation of the title character in the hierarchy of the world presented. Hercules is a god and is taken care of by people. Tarzan, on the other hand, having somehow lost his cultural status, is brought up by gorillas (71–75).[122]

When Hercules reaches the age of 18, he begins to notice his 'monstrosity,' which mainly is expressed by enormous strength. He tries to integrate with a group of boys of his age, but is rejected by them. The young people call him: a "geek," "distructo-boy," and "Jerkules." After another, as we guess, accidental devastation of public property, the boy is described by the inhabitants of the town as a menace, who "is too dangerous to be around normal people." Hercules realises how incompatible he is with the environment in which he grew up and which isolates him, calling him a 'monster' and thus assigning him a mark of exclusion. The 'monstrosity' of the human being can be evidenced, among other things, by an excess of a trait (Wieczorkiewicz, 2009: 11); in the case of Hercules it is, of course, an excess of physical strength. Such an image also appears in compassionate films about superheroes, such as *Batman vs Superman: The Dawn of Justice* (dir. Snyder, 2016) or *Suicide Squad* (dir. Ayer, 2016), in which humanity faces the question of how much one can trust someone of superhuman strength; someone who can use it to do both good and evil.

The twelve labours by Heracles, one of three great groups of myths about this hero, have been limited in Disney's film to the role of snapshots in the song: *From Zero to Hero,* illustrating the life of the main character as a celebrity. Hercules is the definite opposite of the 'original' one from Greek mythology, and its 'new incarnation' may serve to present a need to change the general approach to antiquity at the end of the 20th century.

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[121] Pain and Panic turned into the snakes to 'finish the task' and kill the boy.
[122] It is questionable, especially from the perspective of animal studies, that Tarzan is lower on the hierarchal scale, because he is nursed by and lives with gorillas. Maybe it is better than living with human-monsters.

Despite moving away from the ancient 'original,' the Disney *Hercules* is a full-fledged update of the myth, told to 20th and 21st-century audiences. Although some jokes or cultural references can only be fully understood by Americans,[123] the universal values presented by the creators have reached a wider public all over the world (Konieczna, 2005: 62). The film's quite clear message is the negligible significance of fame and physical strength. Although Phil's training has led Hercules to gain fame and become a hero, it is love, so often appearing in Disney's films, that has led to the recovery of the status of a god, a true hero and a mature man. What is more, Hercules developed so much as a hero that he was able to reject his prize and his old dream of returning to Olympus. Disney love once again dominated the mythical story.

Hercules is vulnerable, sensitive, considerate, and, thanks to his training, becomes able to control his strength. He does not kill anybody besides the monsters, degraded to the role of fairy-tale like creatures just to be eliminated. His biggest flaw is not his temper, as in the 'original' myth, but maybe the naivety of a young boy, who has only started his adventure with adulthood. Also Zeus, his father, cares for him and challenges his son to discover what it means to be a true hero. As the god of thunder says himself: "For a true hero isn't measured by the size of his strength, but by the strength of his heart." The mythical pattern of the gender role of man certainly has changed.

Hercules is another example of the moralistic program of Walt Disney Pictures, popularising the conservative values of American society. However, this animation shows the viewer being winked at and that the film is different to classic' Disney productions, such as *Snow White* (dir. Hand et al., 1997) or *Cinderella* (dir. Geronimi et al., 1950). The main character, although he could be perfect, is clumsy, the female character is independent and ironic, the narration is conducted at a certain distance and with humour, and the musical form has evolved from classical melodies into energetic gospel songs. Popular culture reflects the changes that took place at that time in a community which had found itself in a reality of increasing prosperity and lack of direct military threat, in which the superhero does not have to be a superhero. It is enough for him to have a good heart.

The Mythical Labyrinth: Facing the Monster

Theseus, the founder father of the new polis structures of ancient Athens, was a son of Poseidon[124] and Aethra, who had been offered by her father

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[123]   Not all cultural codes are translatable.
[124]   This, however, is not certain.

to Aegeus, one of Athens' kings (Grimal, 2008: 346). As a test, Aegeus had hidden a pair of sandals and his sword under the rock for his Theseus[125] to collect when he was ready to fulfil his destiny. Until then, the identity of his father remained unknown, as he was raised by his mother in the countryside. When the time came, he collected the royal artefacts from under the rock to prove his strength and began his heroic journey to greatness, which of course included killing a lot of monsters on his way. After entering Athens,[126] and passing several tests,[127] he was welcomed to his father's home, where Medea (Aegeus' wife) tried (unsuccessfully) to poison him. Reunited with his father, he had yet another task to accomplish (347–350).

Several years before, on Crete, Pasiphae, wife of King Minos was with a child that was not conceived with a human being. The queen, cursed by Poseidon, had had sexual "monstrous intercourse" with a white bull, a sacred animal of the gods that was kept by Minos, instead of being sacrificed (279). To have sex with the bull, Pasiphae commissioned Daedalus to build a portable cow that served as a disguise for the queen, and ultimately as a sex accessory. Supposedly, Pasiphae took pleasure from the intercourse and, therefore, became a symbol of women's unstoppable sexual desires. Even though Pasiphae allegedly did not feel pain while giving birth to her human children, in this case, she could not bear the agony, which was already a sign of an unusual birth, as it turned out later, to a monster.[128] The fruit of this encounter was Minotaur, half-man, half-bull, kept by the royal couple in an underground labyrinth designed by Daedalus. He (or 'it')[129] was hidden from the world, did not experience joy or love. It was even doubtful whether Minotaur was able to experience love at all. Each year seven young men and seven maidens had

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[125] Who he treated like a son.
[126] As a young boy perceived by citizens as delicate, with feminine traits.
[127] Catching the Marathonian Bull.
[128] Compare a monstrous birth by Mary Toft (Todd, 1995: 5–6); also, as Thobani (2014) writes (in the English contexts, however, referring to the myth of Theseus): "[...] in English law the act of copulation figured large in theories about the creation of monsters. Sharpe notes that law's concern with the conditions of the birth of the monster often focused on the mother's sexuality. Thus, the presence of a monster was viewed as indicative of bestiality: 'Where a woman brings forth a monster' it is because it has been 'procreated perversely, against the way of human kind,' a 'vice that Aquinas placed at the apex of his hierarchy of vices 'contrary to nature.' So, for example, 'copulation between a mother and an animal' resulted in the offspring being classified as a monster, whereas a mother's 'intense preoccupation with animals' did not in itself lead to the birth of monsters, nor to the mother being classified as monstrous herself." (482). In such a context, Pasiphae can be considered the monstrous mother of a monster. Also see "Case of Monstrosity" published by a T. Tinley, M.D. in the *British Medical Journal* in 1889, where the description of a deformed child can be found (Cockford, 2012: 116).
[129] It depends on the author's approach to this creature, so I will use this personal pronoun interchangeably, depending on the context.

to be delivered to the labyrinth, where, as mythographers suggest, they were devoured by the hungry beast.

Hence Theseus, a young hero, who was to stop the slaughter and free the people from the cruel offerings, set out on his adventure to the island of Crete. Following Ariadne's (Minos' daughter) advice and using a thread not to get lost in the Labyrinth, Theseus found the beast and killed it with no mercy. After committing 'noble murder,' he could go back home in glory. This, however, led him to leave Ariadne on a random island and was the cause of the death of his beloved father.

There is not a lot of information about Minotaur (Grimal, 2008: 237). It is not completely unjustified to assume that Theseus and Minotaur may have been the same age. In the early ancient writings, there is not even a description of the physical appearance of any monster.[130] As the offspring of a nonhuman animal, Minotaur serves in the myth as the opposite to Theseus, who is also only part human. Both of those characters represent the male gender in different aspects. The former, a half-beast, called by Isocrates "τέρας," "a monster,"[131] is something that needs to be exterminated; he is a 'freak' and nature's deviation.[132] The latter does not wholly belong to the human world, either. However, as a half-god, he is perceived as a miracle and has a privileged position. That is not necessarily the case of a centaur, who is also half-man but has a human head. Maybe because of his animal-driven desires, Minotaur is not presented as a sentient creature in this story. He is only the result of a woman's sexual desire and the object of a male's desire to kill.

In children's culture, depictions of Minotaurs are not consistent. In most cases, he is still a scary monster that threatens the protagonist and needs to be defeated.[133] Thus, the scary creature is sometimes kept alive.[134] In James Ford's (2006) version of the myth, Minotaur was innocent, he lived alone in the Labyrinth, did not bother people and only ate rats (12–13). However, there is still no reflection on his fate. Killed by Theseus, the unquestionable hero, he sustained his narrative status of a mythological monster. In Michał Rusinek's (2016) lyrical bestiary, Minotaur was plainly shy and did not like company. Finding new excuses (having flu, his address being hard to find, etc.), he preferred to stay isolated (46–51) and

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[130]   Just as in the case of sirens that appears later in this chapter.

[131]   „At about the same time appeared the monster reared in Crete, the offspring of Pasiphaë, daughter of Helius [ ]," Isocrates, Vol. 1, *Helen*, trans. Norlin, Van Hook, ed. 2015: 75.

[132]   In a bestiary for children by Federica Magrin (2018) there is a significant pointer that the creature, because of his animal head, submits to the most vicious and brutal instincts, and that is why he is so dangerous (22).

[133]   E. g. *The Minotaur* by Russel Punter, 2014; *A-maze-ing Minotaur* by Juliet Rix, 2014.

[134]   Which was already achieved in 'grown-up' literature, like in Herbert's case; see Marciniak, 2018: 526.

not be bothered in his house. In this case, the labyrinth becomes a fortress, but not isolating people from a dangerous monster, but separating a shy creature from annoying people. Similarly, in the *I'm a Monster* series, where the *Minotaur* episode (S01E29, 2011) presents a small, shy young man who was rejected by his family only because he was different. At the beginning of the 21st century, Minotaurs of children's culture are less scary than in the myth, they gain an identity and a backstory, as well as the ability to actually tell it.

Minotaur's situation in texts for an older audience remains complicated and heterogeneous. In *Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lighting Thief* by Rick Riordan (2005) Minotaur is one of the soulless monsters, designed to kill heroes on Hades' demand. The main character, Percy,[135] describes the beast emerging from the darkness, standing in the young hero's way to meet his destiny:

> I looked back. In a flash of lighting, through the mudspattered rear windshield, I saw a figure lumbering towards us on the shoulder of the road. The sight of it made my skin crawl. It was a dark silhouette of a **huge guy**, like a football player. He seemed to be holding a blanket over his head. His top half was bulky and fuzzy. His upraised hands made it look like he had horns. [...]
>
> The man with the blanket on his head kept coming towards us, making his grunting, snorting noises. As he got closer, I realized he couldn't be holding a blanket over his head, because his hands – huge meaty hands – were swinging at his sides. There was no blanket. **Meaning the bulky, fuzzy mass that was too big to be his head... was his head. And the points that looked like horns...**
>
> [...]
>
> Glancing back, I got my first clear look at the monster. He was seven feet tall, easy, his arms and legs like something from the cover of Muscle Man magazine – bulging biceps and triceps and a bunch of other 'ceps, all stuffed like baseballs under vein-webbed skin. He wore no clothes except underwear – I mean, bright white Fruit-of-the-Looms, which would've been funny except for the top half of his body. **Coarse brown hair started at about his bellybutton and got thicker as it reached his shoulders.**
>
> His neck was a mass of muscle and fur leading up to his enormous head, which had a snout as long as my arm, snotty nostrils with a gleaming brass ring, cruel black eyes, and horns – **enormous black-and-white horns with points you just couldn't get from an electric sharpener.** (48–50; emphasis added)

The monster appears unidentified. At first, Percy tries to make a connection between what he sees and what is familiar to him – a football player. As the creature emerges from the darkness, piece by piece, Percy

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[135]   He is the main protagonist and the narrator in the series.

recognises the monster, known by him from Greek mythology. When it attacks Percy, his mother and his friend, Grover, it is obvious that Minotaur has to be destroyed. Percy approaches the mission by imitating traditional Spanish bull fights. He uses his red jacket and waves it in front of the monster (54). Such a reference reflects not only the obsolete approach to the monster and monstrosity but also to animals and the cruel practice that originated on another continent.[136] Minotaur is objectified, presented as a beast by Riordan and treated like one by Percy.

The theme of manliness inspired by Minotaur's myth is also explored by Alex Hirsch in his most famous work to date *Gravity Falls* (2012-2016), a TV-series aired on Disney Channel and Disney XD and temporarily available on Netflix. It is a story about siblings, twins Dipper and Mabel Pines, who spend their summer in the Mystery Shack, a local tourist attraction run by their uncle Stan Pines. Stan is a mountebank who collects 'wonders' from the woods and puts them on display.[137] But a real mystery is hiding in the woods. In the first episode, Dipper finds a mysterious book full of guidelines about strange creatures and phenomena that the siblings discover in the following episodes. Some of them are inspired by classical antiquity.

The main theme of the episode *Dipper vs. Manliness* (S01E06, 2012, creat. Hirsch)[138] is Dipper's quest to find out what it means to be a man. When he tries to prove his physical strength at the beginning of the episode, he fails and faces great humiliation. He runs into the mysterious woods where he meets a minotaur who calls himself Manotaur. The creature was attracted to the smell of jerky eaten by Dipper, this apparently being the manliest food there is. Standing next to Dipper, the Manotaur also smells "emotional issues" and after hearing the boy's story, he decides to help him to become a man. He takes Dipper to the Man Cave where other Manotaurs live, fight with each other, eat meat and prove their manliness.[139] Here Dipper changes his name to Destructor and begins his Mansformation.

Dipper aka Destructor must get through several tasks: plunge his fist into the pain hole, drink straight from a hydrant, jump from a cliff, etc., but his final task is the hardest one. He has to defeat Multi-Bear and bring Manotaur's leader Leaderaur one of his heads. When Dipper is about to kill the Multi-Bear, the creature asks the boy to grant him a last wish – to listen to the girly song Dipper used to love (*Disco Girl* by Babba). They instantly bond through the music and Dipper does not kill Multi-Bear,

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[136]   The Percy Jackson series takes place in the USA.
[137]   E.g. he has sewn together two animals, claiming it was a newly discovered hybrid.
[138]   The analysis of *Dipper vs. Manliness* is partly based on the entry under the same title (Mik 2019e).
[139]   Their names are Pubitaur, Testosteraur, Pituitar, etc.

realising what it truly means to be a man. It is not to be hairy or physically strong but to have the courage to stand for what you believe in and be who you really are, especially when the whole world is against you. In the end, Dipper gets one hair on his chest.

In mythology, Minotaur was presented as a vicious monster. Maybe that is why Hirsch decided to transform this cultural figure and present it as the embodiment of manliness. The Minotaur is half-animal, so he has all the traits culturally associated with the stereotype of a 'real man': hairiness, aggressiveness, eagerness to fight other men, a preference for eating raw meat, but also has a strong bodily odour (still manly), low intelligence, competitiveness, etc. This construct is presented as the 'wrong' gender pattern, and the 'real manliness' is criticised and derided. Being a man is about being sensitive, clever, determined, but also patient and confident. All those traits would also apply to girls who are growing up. So maybe, at the end of the day, it is all about being a good person.

Also, even though Hirsch has not put the labyrinth as such in the animation, the woods full of mysteries could represent the complicated path towards adulthood that Dipper has to follow. Just like Theseus, he has to defeat the Minotaur, which is his idea of a 'real man,' to begin truly believing in himself and to gain the confidence required of a young man. It is also a metaphorical questioning of the myth and facing the reality that surrounds him. This happens when he confronts his beliefs about what being a man is with what it actually is.

Both Hercules and Dipper explored their manhood in the early stage, facing mythology from only slightly different perspectives. Both redefined manliness and showed that being a man did not mean fitting into patterns offered by society. Their characters show not only how to be a man but also the various possibilities to discover oneself despite monstrous gender, luring around the corner.

Minotaurs present in children's and young adult culture are most often, but not always, male. However, there is at least one example of a female Minotaur that comes from the book by Catherynne M. Valente: *The Girl Who Fell Beneath Fairyland and Led the Revels There* (2012), which is a continuation of a series about the girl September, travelling through magical worlds. In this part, she and her friends explore the underworld of the titled Fairyland. At some point of the story, they end up in a room decorated with Greek artefacts that remind September of her favourite myth about Perseus, and pictures presenting a beautiful girl with a thread in her hands (287). At the table they notice a she-Minotaur in glasses lighting up one of the candles. Her description leaves no doubt about who she is:

> The Minotaur rested in a luxurious chocolate-colored chair, like those one might find in a lawyer's or principal's office. **September had got quite**

used to thinking of Minotaurs as boys in her reading, for they always seemed to be – but this one was most certainly a lady. Enormous, curving dark horns crowned her head. She had a very wide nose with a light covering of nearly invisible fur, save that the candlelight made her scant pelt ripple with fire when she moved. She wore a thick brass ring in her nose, and her ears were furry and long like a cow's, but beyond that **her face was quite human**, with big, liquid brown eyes behind her librarian's glasses, and full, dark lips. Her hands folded gracefully in front of her. Under the deck, strong, hard hooves peeked out from under a plain brown schoolmarm skirt. (206–207; emphasis added)

A female Minotaur definitely differs from a male one. She is more delicate, not dangerous or aggressive, she even has a human face. Almost as if it were impossible for a male Minotaur to have one as well, with his manliness being nearly purely animalistic. Her 'labyrinth' is also different: September walked through it unknowingly, as it was all together, a mine, an ocean, books and hidings – all belonging to the fantastic maze. As Minotaur says herself: "A labyrinth, when it is big enough, is just the world" (207).

Not only does the she-Minotaur redefine mythology, but she also redefines the gender of this monster as well. When September says that she used to think only bulls had horns, the minotaur responds that she thought only boys wore pants (207–208). Left (as the minotaur later reveals that is her name) embraces her gender with fierceness and self-confidence. Not only that, but she also embraces her identity – as it turned out she is a descendant of an ancient Minotaur, who yes, died in a fight with some "Babylonian scoundrel" but ultimately began a whole minotaur civilisation, in the labyrinth, hidden from the world for centuries (209). Left also claims they were good monsters and did not want to bother anyone – as we all are monsters. And it is up to us which kind we want to be: "The kind who builds towns or the kind who breaks them" (210).

Heracles, Theseus and Minotaur share features of the pop culture monster. To a certain extent they represent the harmful characteristics of a man's image, but at the same time, especially Heracles and Minotaur, they are figures of exclusion. Later re-tellings of myths featuring those characters try to redefine the notion of a man and expose the brutality and recklessness of the ancient heroes. Monsters of the 21st century are not only signs of exclusion but also represent a change in thinking about what it means to be a man. Ultimately, they contradict the idea of ancient heroes being positive characters. As the examples above show, monstrosity is not consistent and on multiple occasions, it intertwines with heroism.

The Monstrous Female

*Centauresy broniące tronu wznosiły się, powoli i harmonijnie
łopocąc skrzydłami, na najwyższe szczyty cynobrowych poranków.*
[Centaurides guarding the throne were rising, slowly and harmoniously,
flapping their wings, to the highest peaks of cinnabaric mornings.]
Aleksander Wat, *Nocne rozrywki gentelmena*
[A Gentleman's Nightlife], 1978: 230.

In her study, Anna Wieczorkiewicz (2009) mentions that in the 16th century there was quite a popular german concept of a sinful woman, with bat wings and the leg of a bird of prey – *Frau Welt* (18). It was supposed to be a personification of worldly sensual joy and worldly happiness, equal to sinfulness connected specifically with women. It is not a coincidence that this particular figure was linked to animals that became parts of her. Discussing the monstrosity of a woman, Wieczorkiewicz points to the typical strategy of creating a monster: mixing different parts of human and nonhuman animals. It might be claimed that such hybrids not only present women as monstrous creatures, but also reflect the union between women and animals that can coexist in harmony and in such an empowered form fight with those who threaten them.

Similar depictions of 'animalistic women' or those connected with Nature in other ways can be found in youth culture as well.[140] The embodiment of those figures would be (among many others) Fiona Hsieh's animation: *Beast* (2014), where a fantastic monster, caught, beaten and imprisoned by cruel men, is saved by a woman, who had been treated by the same men in the same way. Together, they are able to find freedom and happiness, apart from the fact that they are destined to die. As Amy Ratelle (2015) claims: "[...] technology of animality [...] oppressed both women and animals" (35). She highlights that as an excluded group, women and animals often – figuratively or literally – support each other (Mik 2021b). Such a claim, applied to works recalled in this chapter, might lead to the conclusion that the connection between women and Nature is unbreakable.

Feminist studies very often find their way into ecocriticism, where the feminine, frequently the monstrous feminine, is what protects/brings life to Nature. According to Julia Fiedorczuk (2015), the concept of 'ecofeminism' was introduced by Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 in *Le féminisme ou la mort*. Fiedorczuk argues that it is in women that there is a power that could lead to an ecological revolution. Women as subordinate beings would have a better understanding of nature, which is also under the

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[140] In this chapter I analyse the construction of a monstrous woman, thus considering that not only biological women can be identified as female.

domination of man (155). Roberta Seelinger Trites (2018) also concludes that "[e]cofeminism and material feminism are interrelated, especially in the way that ecofeminism insists on the agency of the natural world" (59). Jane Caputi (2004) alludes to such methodological strategies as well:

> Feminist and otherwise resistant perspectives allow us to consciously recognize these tributes as they continue to suffuse some, though certainly not all popular stories and songs. In these, we can trace a record, albeit a coded one, of wisdoms that have had to go underground to survive the brainwashings wrought by patriarchal domination, taking form in the suppression and domestication of women; the persecution of gender and sexual variance; imperialist colorizations and a continuous assault on the elements, living creatures, and the green world. This resistant wisdom tradition pops up, for example, in the ongoing belief in psychic phenomena; in the "green consciousness" (environmental awareness and nature reverence) especially prevalent in children's culture; in radical conspiracy theorizing that recurrent presence of the death goddess as monster, sex symbol, mammy, mystery lady, Amazon, and femme fatale; in the open invitation to take a fantastic voyage to other worlds/possibilities and in all the various retellings of wonder stories communicating hope, telling those who are despairing that the dreams that they "dare to dream really do come true." (5–6)

As monsters, female creatures might show the reader/viewer what a world liberated from patriarchy can look like, as fantastic stylistics allow the authors to create 'unreal' constructions out of this world. What is more, the relationship between women and Nature gives such images a distinct character, especially in the context of ecological trends intensified in the second decade of the 21st century. Female monsters inspired by classical mythology invite the reader to fantastic worlds where there is still hope for new life to prosper.

This is not the only type of relation between female monsters and the environment. Women for ages were perceived (and to a certain extent still are) as lesser than men, just like Nature can be perceived as less valuable than Culture. As Eliza T. Dresang (2002) reminds us:

> One way that authors have attempted to depict strong, independent female characters is through role reversal, that is, by placing women in adventurous roles that have typically been the province of men. The virtue of role reversal may have grown out of existentialist feminism, whose most articulate proponent was Simone De Beauvoir. Her seminal work in feminist study, The Second Sex, described women as "the other," the second or lesser sex. De Beauvoir concluded in some cases that adopting roles played by men was the way to equalize power rather than accepting subjugated roles created by men. (225)

Not only because of their sex, but also, or primarily, because of their gender, women were excluded from the main discourse for centuries and still are not fully appreciated as fully-fledged members of society. A great example of such exclusion in the context of monstrosity would be witches, whose monster-like identity was forced on them for not fulfilling patriarchal patterns,[141] also present in the ancient myths.[142] From the very beginning, women lacked a voice, visibility, depending on men as their leaders, masters, often owners. Even today, in the light of conservative law,[143] women are treated like animals, mainly for reproductive reasons and due to the house services they ought to provide. Otherwise, they can be still easily called 'witches,' eagerly placed on a metaphorical burning pyre where they are humiliated and harassed (Miller, 2018). Maybe that is why many who oppose such behaviour and fight for women's rights are often considered monsters endangering man (not human) kind.

As far as youth culture is concerned, Trites (1997) asserts that "[no] organized social movement has affected children's literature as significantly as feminism has" (ix). Beverly Lyon Clark (2000) also underlines:

> Feminist thinking, in one form or another, has long been implicated in and by children's literature, which has been a venue receptive to women writers, especially during the twentieth century. Women are well represented among those who write, edit, buy, read, and teach children's literature. It is no accident that 69 percent of the recipients of the Newbery Medal for outstanding work in American children's literature have been women, whereas women have won only 34 percent of the Pulitzer Prizes for fiction and 9 percent of the Nobel Prizes in Literature. (2)

Clark's observation of women and children's literature seems quite accurate. It is to the opposite situation as far as men are concerned, who are predominantly responsible for telling most of the mythological stories. As the researcher continuous: "One trend in feminist criticism of children's literature has been to reclaim women authors who have been undervalued" (3). Such claims do not apply only to children's literature. A lot of audio-visual texts for the youngest, if not created, are often co-created by women, who dominate the area of youth culture as authors and become a large part of the future generation's upbringing. This does not only concern female readers and viewers but also any excluded group. As Christine Wilkie-Stibbs writes in her book *The Feminine Subject in Children's Literature* (2002):

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[141]   For a detailed exploration of this topic see *Sorcières: la puissance invaincue des femmes* (Chollet, 2019).

[142]   Thessaly, presumably, was the land of witches. Although Medea, Hecate, Kirke were considered to be witches, they do not appear in children's and young adult culture very often. Hence, their absence in the book.

[143]   For example, developed by the Polish "Law&Justice" government.

> The feminine [understood in the context of psychoanalysis – AM] is an exploration of an alternative aesthetics for children's literature that gives voice to some latent silences and apparent absences in a body of children's literature texts, and in the critical discourses about children's literature that have been otherwise unexpressed, unwritten, and therefore unread. (1)

Although the situation of the silenced groups may be changing in the 21st century, especially concerning children's and young adult culture created by women, the transformation of gender patterns is still however in progress, as their representatives continue to face oppression from various environments. Women are not always accepted in society, even though the terror of exclusion should have ended a long time ago, or rather should have never taken place. They still have to fight for their rights and also do it via characters in literary texts. And although I am not going to analyse texts within children's culture in the context of psychoanalysis, the diagnosis issued by Wilkie-Stibbs seems to be crucial. As in culture,[144] especially in popular culture, *the feminine* is neglected, children's culture must gain, or re-gain, the voice that belongs to all women, including the youngest. The author also states that writing in the spirit of *the feminine* does not mean an exclusion of men or boys (2), so that lesson might and actually should be dedicated to representatives of all genders, or even all monsters.

Female characters of classical mythology are, at first glance, divided into goddesses,[145] mortals,[146] and 'deadly and heartless monsters.' Goddesses are usually put above any kind of feminine categorisation. Even though they are also very often deceived by men, predominantly gods, they sustain their high position and power over humans. Mortal women are often used by gods and heroes as well, although they do not have the same opportunity for a renewal of their position in society that divine creatures, like goddesses, have. In the light of feminism, monster women seem to be the most powerful, and many characters are simply scared off. Unlike others, they disturb the order, introduce chaos, ultimately becoming victims of mythological heroes. They almost always have certain animal traits: Medusa with her snake-hair, sirens with bird wings, Echidna with a snake tail, etc. Their nonhuman animality corresponds to monstrous femininity and makes them stand out from the rest of the 'normal' women.

When discussing the monstrous looks of female characters it is worth recalling the views of Ferguson (2018) who observes that:

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[144]   Caputi (2004) states that already in antiquity women were dominated and colonised by the patriarchy (7–8).
[145]   Which also might have had some animal attributes, as Athena and her owl.
[146]   Often mothers of heroes.

[...] males were more typically embodied as powerful, wild and potentially dangerous beasts such as dragons, bears and tigers, while females tended to anthropomorphise smaller and more vulnerable creatures such as birds, cats and insects.

However, considering Greek and Roman mythology, this is simply not true. Wings, fish tails, lion bodies, snakes for hair are animal parts of a human body which might also be interpreted as stigmas of monstrosity but certainly not as stigmas of weakness. As Caputi (2014) states: "Goddess/monster myth reserializes animals and, concomitantly, those traits we associate with animals in ourselves: intuition, instinct, sexuality, and mortality" (14). Women-animal hybrids were often described as monsters and those frequently played the role of antagonists, although their 'monstrous attitudes' were in most cases justified within the narrative. Texts from children's culture revise their stories and remind readers and viewers of their 'true' origins. By presenting the reasons standing behind the monstrous women's motivations, the authors show children and young adults that the world is not morally binary. As the following examples will show, children's culture is even more sensitive towards women monsters and tries to understand those characters as they truly are.

Monstrous women of the classical world do not only have nonhuman animal traits, but they also often share a special bond with mythical beasts. In the foreword to *The White Goddess* (orig. 1948; 1966), Robert Graves recalls a passage from Plato's *Phaedrus*. As he highlights, for Socrates, the rape on the nymph Orthya is as absurd as believing in centaurs or Pegasus (11). He also mentions that Socrates rarely visited the countryside and defined himself as a 'townsman.' He saw no sense in gaining knowledge from nature, and "in turning his back on poetic myths, [he] was really turning his back on the Moon-goddess who inspired them and who demanded that man should pay woman spiritual and sexual homage [...]" (11). This passage shows an interesting parallel between the world of mythical animals and mythical women: both neglected, treated as a marginal construct of ancient society. According to Graves, the depiction of rape should not be acknowledged, as it is a fantastic image given by the ancient philosopher. Similarly, cruelty towards the fantastic creatures should not be taken seriously, as it is pure fiction. However, I claim that cultural depictions concerning any matter, even if presented in the fictional convention, are particularly strong, maybe especially when it comes to children's and young adult culture. Being marked as signs of exclusion I take a closer look at women and animals in their monstrous and mythical union.

This unusual act of women–animal bond (e.g. Pasiphae and the bull, Leda and the swan), divine cooperation between two excluded

representatives, is also acknowledged in human–animal studies (see Chapter II). And as will further be established in the chapter, that would not be the only case. Greek mythology abounds in female characters that combine traits of humans and animals. Although the monstrous hybrids of antiquity often played the roles of antagonists, their 'bad side' is almost always justified. This is usually the case of the two kinds of monsters inspired by classical antiquity that dominate the popular monstrous discourse, those of sirens and gorgons discussed below.

Embodiments of Wildness: Sirens and Mermaids

Mythical sirens are dangerous women. Elaine L. Graham (2002) reminds us:

> The epitome of full humanity was the free man, so depictions of 'others' drew upon a symbolic hierarchy in which the Greek male citizen was defined in opposition to barbarians, women and animals. Monsters that were hybrids of women and animals embodied sexual voracity and danger, and their presence in the polis signified chaos and disruption. Similarly, sea-monsters such as sirens and mermaids have traditionally symbolized the equation of women with watery elements, but always retained a clear distinction between their proper province and that of the ship, which represented mastery of the sea [...] Thus monsters marked the 'fault-line' between appropriate social spheres as well as those between separate species. (47–48)

This however does not exclusively apply to the classical tradition. Watery female creatures from various cultures and traditions often threatened men, lost in the woods, near the lakes, lured to the sea shores. 'Baba wodna,' 'rusałka,' (Zych, Vargas, 2013: 12), 'bogunki' (34), present in Slavic culture, are only some examples of the female monster inhabiting Polish waters, waiting for men to lose their way. Most of those creatures have fish-like parts which correspond to a rather common trend in popular culture. In the second half of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century, we are probably more likely to meet sirens with fish tails than with wings.[147] All these creatures combine several features, such as unusual beauty and the ability to seduce men by singing. This is probably to kill them and then devour them. It cannot be denied, however, that not only in children's culture, was the predation of sirens somehow replaced by sequences of romantic heroines, which was certainly influenced by Walt Disney Pictures' animation: *The Little Mermaid* from 1989 (dir. Clements, Musker). The main feature of the

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[147]   In Polish, there is no distinction between an ancient siren (Sirens) and fish, often present in legends (Mermaids). They all go by one name: 'syrena' (see Chapter I).

title character was still beautiful singing[148] but apart from this, she had little in common with ancient mermaids or those known from folklore. As in many other cases, Disney's animation, very loosely based on Hans Christian Andersen's work (under the same title, orig. 1837, 2019), dominates the popular culture image of the siren and the mermaid, and many later works refer to it.[149]

Sirens are, by nature, an embodiment of popular culture. As Judith Peraino (2005) writes:

> [...] the Siren's song can be considered music that has mass appeal; after all, anyone who hears it becomes its captive. [...] The Sirens' song [...] has the power to call each and every listener to a critical focus on the past and future self, on the self in relation to society, to ideology. (2)

Supposedly, the siren's song was first sung in Book XII of Homer's *Odyssey* (trans. Murray, ed. 1995). As Circe, a mythical witch, warns Odysseus of all the hardships that might stand on his way home, she says:

> So did all that come to pass: and now listen to what I shall tell you, and a god shall himself bring it to your mind. First you will come to the Sirens, who beguile all men who come to them. Whoever in ignorance draws near to them and hears the Sirens' voice, his wife and little children never stand beside him and rejoice at his homecoming; instead, the Sirens beguile him with their clear-toned song, as they sit in the meadow, and about them is a great heap of bones of moldering men, and round the bones the skin is shriveling. (451)

Circe does not describe what sirens look like, Odysseus also omits the description of their looks, the voice is the only thing pointed out by Homer. Odysseus' crew also only heard their voices, but did not see them. As Peraino (2005) points out, the Sirens' song, being a "mythical power, was far from neutralized with Odysseus's survival. Indeed, his survival has made us all wonder about what he heard" (2). The voice seems to be the essence of those creatures. Hannah Silverblank (2018) even wonders if "perhaps the Sirens' bodies merit no description because their monstrous allure and danger are located in Sirens' voices, rather than in their physical forms" (38). Further on she also points out that:

> Homer's Sirens engender an intense psycho-physiological experience for their listener through the medium of the voice itself, rather than through visuality or tactility. The erotic power of listening to a voice, the Odyssey seems to say, transcends the mere visuality and corporeality typical of erotic encounters. (39–40)

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[148]   The motif of voice and its reception is very important in this film.
[149]   For more of the reception of antiquity in *The Little Mermaid* see Mik, 2016a.

It would seem as if in this particular case the physicality of a monster is not a constitutive part of it. What makes sirens monstrous is their voice that becomes a representation of the feminine power of seduction. In the mythical scenario, it is not men's fault that they lose their way but that of dangerous women with magical powers who are just waiting on the waterfront to devour their innocent victims. This feature of a siren, a deadly voice, is the constitutive part of their monstrosity.

There were only three cases of offsetting the siren's song: the song of Orpheus[150] (Argonauts myth), the song of the Muses and the sound of silence (Odysseus waxed his crew's ears). Besides those cases, it might be claimed that sirens' song is deadly and powerful. Then it is no wonder it became a metaphor for the voiceless woman of the 20th and 21st centuries, also in children's and young adult culture.

In other sources,[151] sirens were depicted as birds with a woman's face: once they were handmaids of Persephone; Demeter changed them into birds to help find her daughter when she was abducted by Hades. One of the versions also says that sirens were given wings by Aphrodite who wanted them to stay virgins. Another mentions that Hera deprived them of their wings and made a crown out of them when she and the Muses won the singing competition, which, in turn, might symbolise loss of virginity.[152]

As Silverblank (2018) writes:

> Of all the sweet voices that resound though ancient Greek myth, the Sirenic voice resents the most developed portrait of the matrix of temptation, interiority, and fatality that accompanies the allure of music. The Siren's song operates in a manner that paradoxically caters to and precludes the possibility of satisfying the hero's desires. In Homer's Odyssey, the Sirens offer to their audience a melodious rendition of the listeners' deepest longing, translated into song. (37)

Thus, from the very beginning of the siren tradition it was the voice of women, not their looks, that was most dangerous. It was an expression of their sexuality and ultimately became their deadly weapon. Hence, in the following examples, it would not matter if the sirens/mermaids had a fish tail or bird wings. In looking for their voice, I will try to examine how the ancient song works in texts for young people and what this song says about female monsters in general.

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[150]   The Myth of the Argonauts.
[151]   Euripides, *Helen* (trans. Kovacs, ed. 2015: 33), Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* (trans. Race, ed. 2015: 401).
[152]   It might be an accurate context for the interpretation of *Maleficent* (Stomberg, 2014), where the main character – a winged fairy – was deprived of her wings by her lover, Stephen.

Fiji and her Descendants

Named after the island where she had been 'found,' Fiji was put on display by P. T. Barnum in his museum in the 1840s. Thanks to her extraordinary looks and exotic origins she made a career as the only real mermaid caught by man. Unfortunately, she is not a long-lasting one. How real was she? In fact, the Fiji mermaid was purchased by an American sea captain from Japanese sailors. Japanese fishermen were known to construct 'mermaids' by sewing together the upper body of an ape to the tail of a fish. Exhibited, it was supposed to cure diseases (Landrin, 1875: 297).

The same creature can be found in a Mystery Shack run by Uncle Stan, a character from *Gravity Falls*. Here, she appears as a tourist attraction and curiosity. Mystery Shack itself is the realisation of Barnum's business: artificially made wonders attract naïve people who spend money to see supernatural creatures. The idea of Fiji comes back in another episode, but it is rather meaningless and random.

Even though this anecdote seems to be more entertaining than educational, the question is: Why has the possibility of a mermaid's existence always been so fascinating, not only for Barnum, but also other explorers, scientists, writers, painters, and tourists? The story about Fiji shows that one of the possibilities might be the concept of a woman/animal body, an intriguing combination: a monster that, in a way, seduced them, just like the sirens in antiquity.

The biological dichotomy of a mermaid seems to sustain this phenomenon. If we go back to olden times, we will see that part human, part animal creatures – mythological hybrids – were, on the one hand, dangerous monsters,[153] whereas on the other, objects of human admiration. I believe that thanks to the study of the 'bogus' monsters, we can examine many contemporary real-life issues. The biological status of mythical creatures is very often not defined, which helps to reconsider ours. The presence of this concept in various texts, also in children's and young adult culture, provokes yet another question: where is the line between a human and nonhuman animal? Going further, we may ask whether there is any.

The same question could apply to the depiction of mermaids in the Disney animation *King Neptune* from 1932 (dir. Gillett),[154] a disturbing image presenting the possible caption of the Fiji mermaid. To answer the question of whether mermaids are more women or fish I will go through

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[153]   "Monstrous melange" as Matt Kaplan (2013: 89) puts it.

[154]   Although it is not a product of the second half of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century, it is in my viewing a very important context to this book, hence its presence in this chapter. The analysis of *King Neptune* is based on the entry I have published in Our Mythical Survey (Mik, 2018a).

the animation and study closely the movement of the mythological female monsters and how their dynamics express their nature. I will focus on their behaviour and motivation cooperating with the needs of men occurring in the animation, as well as with animals living in the ocean. Hopefully, the study of the animation will reveal some secrets behind Disney thought and allow us to listen to the mermaid's song of 20th century America.

The animation starts with the introduction of King Neptune sitting on his throne in his underwater kingdom. He sings:

> I'm Neptune,
> The king of the sea,
> And a jolly old king am I,
> I rule the sea with an iron hand,
> They obey my will or die,
> The sailors are my loyal friends,
> And friends of theirs am I,
> I'm Neptune,
> The king of the sea,
> And a jolly old king am I.

As he sings, the orchestra consisting of various sea creatures[155] accompany him. They are an opening parade for mermaids, who visit King Neptune and gracefully swim around him, pinching him as he tries to catch them, causing general laughter. There is something very tempting and sexual in the mermaids' movement, considering both their female and animal parts. The girls seduce their King not only with their bare breasts[156] but also with their fish tails, swinging like human hips.

This jolly scene, however, is about to be interrupted. On the surface, a ship full of drunk pirates approaches the settlement of King Neptune. One of the pirates spots the mermaids relaxing on the rocks. Here, on land, fishtails, the essence of the underwater movement, become the weakest part of the creatures' bodies, as the mermaids cannot escape or defend themselves from the perpetrator. Loathsome men kidnap an unsuspecting mermaid. She tries to free herself, but the delicate creature does not stand a chance. Pirates surround her and try to touch her, which suggests an attempt at sexual abuse.

Fortunately, the rest of the mermaids immediately raise an alarm. The whole sea[157] arms themselves and gather all their forces to free the kidnapped mermaid. The men cannot prevail faced with octopuses flying as helicopters and whales firing at fishes. The pirates are defeated and punished. King Neptune, temporarily trapped by the anchor and chains

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[155]   Octopuses, sea horses, etc.
[156]   Which is already unusual for a children's animation.
[157]   Waters and sea creatures combined.

of the pirates' ship, is now free and deals the final blow. He sinks the ship and sits on it as he previously did on his throne. The abused mermaid is rewarded with diamonds from the pirates' treasure, and the rest of the girls help themselves from the treasure as well. Here, we see them throwing themselves on the box just like fish on bait, as their movement is similar, if not the same. King Neptune's final song reaffirms once and for all that he is the definite master of the sea, and everything goes back to the status quo.

In Greek and Roman mythology sirens/mermaids were depicted as dangerous creatures that harmed lost sailors. They were unforgiving and cruel and barely showed any human traits. Here, the roles are reversed: innocent girls are abused by vicious men who just want to use and hurt them. In *King Neptune* mermaids are delicate, gentle, and not dangerous at all.[158] Men took on the role of the mythical siren; however, instead of devouring women, they attempt to rape them, which symbolically might carry the same meaning. Of course, Disney's mermaids belong to various depictions of those creatures drawn from wide 'mythology of the sea,' so not only from the classical tradition, but also from the folklore of sailors, etc.

As far as the Disney animation is concerned, mermaids do not cover their breasts which are tastefully but distinctly drawn and shown. This strategy of the drawing will slowly decline in the next animations, although it is interesting that even in times of censorship, Disney seemed to be less conservative than now. But the feminine seems to be something more than only the depiction of women's bare chests. After the 'rape scene,' when all the sea finds out about the kidnapping, we deal with a very interesting image of a cultural construct: nature[159] is reacting aggressively to the threat created by men. It shows not only solidarity among women but also between women and nature. Sea creatures do not hesitate or ask any questions: they simply attack the ship, the embodiment of evil and danger. Their determination shows the great power and potential of cooperation between women and animals, even if it is only a symbolic depiction of a utopian matriarchal dream. After all, King Neptune is the one who definitively deals with pirates and keeps his position in the underwater hierarchy. At the end of the day, as he sings himself, he is a good friend to sailors.

In the 1932 Disney *King Neptune*, as well as it might in the 21ˢᵗ century, children's and adults' attention may be drawn to various issues and phenomena. In between the wars, one of Disney's goals was to unite the nation via propaganda cartoons, and this certainly might be considered

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[158] Which is not an original concept, as for example, the *Little Mermaid* by Hans Christian Andersen already softened the classical depiction of sirens.
[159] Importantly: water, often connected to the feminine.

to be one of them. After all, the animation is a depiction of a conflict: external as well as internal. We can witness an immediate and quite aggressive reaction to an act of violence, which we might link to a war – past, or upcoming. But at the same time we can treat the animation as a metaphorical battle between men and women, masculine and feminine, human and nonhuman. The moving myth certainly serves here as an introduction to the concepts of the feminine and animal, even if it is subtle and may be recognised only as a second layer of the plot.

According to Matt Kaplan (2013):

> Depiction of Sirens in art and literature made many years after Homer show these monsters as bird-women, presumably because birds sing and because many birds are, in fact, carnivorous and sit in nests surrounded by skeletons and rotting flesh. Yet, Homer's decision to not describe the Siren's bodies is worth noting, since so many other monsters in his stories are described in great detail. (125)

The same author claims that the gender of the sirens is also not obvious. The paradox of a mermaid might support the development of a not yet formed child who is looking for its cultural identification (see Chapter VI).

In reality, both of those creatures, women and fish, are desired by men, often as trophies, an evidence of their masculinity. In *King Neptune* both of those needs are comprised into one, as both a woman and a fish are considered as one whole. After all, a sailor caught a woman, but also a fish. If not for the upper body of a human, this depiction would not be as controversial as it is now. Benjamin Radford (2017) claims: "The reality of mermaids was assumed during medieval times, when they were depicted matter-of-factly alongside known aquatic animals such as whales" (online). Contemporary mermaids not only are acknowledged to be something more than a nonhuman animals but also a symbol of women empowerment.

In this form, a figure that is both a woman and a nonhuman animal fights the patriarchy, with the help of a sea army. The social movement of the sea is happening right here, right now. This phenomenon perfectly reflects new humanism thought. In her introduction to *Thinking Animals. Why Animal Studies Now?*, Kari Weil (2012) writes that "[...] feminists such as Carol Adams and Josephine Donovan have illustrated and theorised how oppressions of gender, race, and species are interlocking [...]" (xviii). In the recalled scene, intersected groups of women and animals created an unstoppable force against men aggressors. Of course, this is not the only possibility of interpretation. According to Sigmund Freud (orig. 1899; 2010), fish might be a genital symbol (370) and water is a common symbol of the unconscious (410–412). Kaplan (2013) even claims that "[g]iven the extensive descriptions of so many other monsters, however, it seems more likely that Homer simply wanted to have a monster in his story

that represented the fears associated with the temptations of the flesh. [...]" (125). This path might not even be a contradictory one, but demands further research. Some interpretations of mermaids even exclude the woman figure from the discourse, as in Homer's *Odyssey* where there is no actual description of a siren's looks (124).

Nevertheless, the connection between women and animals in *King Neptune*, in both the mermaid figure and relationship with sea animals, shows to be exceptionally strong. The sea environment provided within the plot highlights the 'fluid' character of this relationship that, just in the water, needs no borders. The same goes with the mermaid herself. The freedom of their existence is sustained by the mermaid's movement, both gracious and smooth, in perfect harmony with her surroundings. Just like the sea, the mermaid's body is fluid, so is its cultural identification. There is no need to sew an ape together with a fish to create a circus attraction, an artificial construct provided by man. They might not be what humans expect, but they are certainly what the world needs in the 21st century.

A variety of monstrous transformations is offered by television, and even more often by the Internet. There we can find, for example, an animated series called *I'm a Monster* (11, 2010) launched by "Monster Kids Channel" and supported by "Monster! Entertainment."[160] In each episode, one monster presents itself and its story, assumingly in a fresh, up-to-date way. One of them presents a mermaid character projected as a valley girl:

> Hey! I'm, like, a mermaid? But, OMG! I am totally freaked out right now! It says in here that I'm... some kind of a monster? Moi? But I'm so priiittteee! I do really cool stuff – like hang out under the ocean. I can breathe under water! How awesome is that? So, okay, big deal – I've got a fish tail instead of legs. But, like WHAT-EVER! The rest of me is... purrr-fect! Plus, I'm a really sweet singer. Tra! La! La! Does that sound like a monster to you? I mean – Duh! Because monsters are bad right? I'm not bad. Is it, like, my fault sea captains and sailors don't watch where they're going? Is it my fault that I'm just so... adorable?

This pop-cultural transformation of the mythological, once very dangerous monster, represents a broader phenomenon of taming various beasts and showing their 'better' side.[161] The mermaid is just another celebrity that could easily live in one of the Hollywood mansions, maybe just next to Disney's Hercules. She is shallow, not

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[160]   There was also another episode from the *I'm a Monster* series titled: *The Sirens* (2018), where sirens practice in a choir. Since it is only a rehearsal, they are not as deadly as usual. They recall the myth of Persephone, making the direct link to the 'original' story. However, in this episode, the creatures appear to be more 'funny birds' than women, hence their representation does not correspond to the book's thesis.

[161]   Examples of such modifications would be: *Shrek, Hotel Transylvania, Monster High*, etc.

very smart, but very attractive. Here, refutation of a myth results in sustaining another one, that of a superficial, rich and pretty woman, who cares only about herself. The mermaid does not kill anymore but instead arouses 'cheap' compassion.

'Taming the monster' also went to extremes in *My Little Pony. Friendship Is Magic*, a probably more popular show dedicated to a young audience and developed by Lauren Faust and Hasbro Studios in 2010-2019. Here, we do not meet any humans, although all the characters might be interpreted as representing them. The action takes place in the land of Equestria, populated by a variety of ponies, including different types of Pegasus and unicorns, along with other sentient and non-sentient creatures. The universe of the series is constructed around the idea of a mythical land ruled by and consisting of young women,[162] where men protagonists appear very rarely. This model could be interpreted as the metaphor of a perfectly working matriarchal system, where women, cooperating with one another, can create a world full of understanding and mutual empathy, which offers a great lesson for all young girls and boys watching the series.

In this world, monsters are often male and play the role of antagonists in each episode,[163] but those of interest to us in the contexts of the siren come from the spin-off movie: *My Little Pony Equestria Girls: Rainbow Rocks* (dir. Thiessen, Rudell, 2014). Monstrous sirens here would be The Dazzlings, a musical group and the main antagonists of the movie. The group consists of three sirens, who originally roamed Equestria, spreading disharmony among ponies with their siren's songs. They fed off the ponies' negative energies to make their voices and magic more powerful to conquer Equestria. It was mentioned at the 2014 San Diego Comic-Con panel that the Dazzlings were inspired by the sirens of Greek mythology, who often lured sailors with their beautiful songs and caused shipwrecks. In Equestria, the sirens' appearance is similar to that of a hippocampus, another mythical sea creature, rather than a traditional siren. In the human world, the Dazzlings' anthropomorphic forms possess translucent fins on their backs, like those on their true forms' front legs. They are evil and must be defeated as reintegration is not possible.

Female monsters in *My Little Pony* appear rarely, most of them being presented as beautiful and powerful, and if they behave badly at the beginning, they get the chance for reconciliation. In both, *I'm a Monster* and *My Little Pony* we are dealing with animations where monsters, in general, are 'sugary' and not scary at all. That changes in texts for older audiences.

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[162] Presented as ponies.
[163] Like Minotaur, Manticore or Centaur.

In *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* Rowling (2001) points out that, "[...] love of music [...] is common to all merpeople" (29) which somehow connects them directly to the mythical sirens, and by extension to the legendary mermaids. These creatures were probably a prime inspiration for Rowling to create an underwater kingdom of merpeople, although mythology would still be an important source. Merpeople's status in the world presented in the *Harry Potter* series, especially in the fourth book, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (Rowling, 2000), is also quite 'mythological.' They live at the bottom of Hogwarts' Great Lake (Mik 2021a) but are rarely seen. The notions the wizards have about them are also different from who they really are. In the book we read: "Harry saw faces... faces that bore no resemblance at all to the painting of the mermaid in the Prefects' bathroom." (432) Their looks scare him a bit too: "The merpeople had grayish skins and long, wild, dark green hair. Their eyes were yellow, as were their broken teeth, and they wore thick ropes of pebbles around their necks." (432) With this 'culture come-back' to the 'real' mythological sirens, Rowling tries to change readers' perspective and their ideas of anthropomorphised, Disney-like creatures that in 'reality' look and behave quite differently. She even resists the name 'mermaid.' This literary depiction can also apply to any animal-like cultural representation of creatures, often simplified by popular culture in the past.

Merpeople are well-organised as a community:

> A whole crowd of merpeople were floating in front of the houses that lined what looks like a mer-version of a village square. a choir of merpeople were singing in the middle, calling the champions towards them, and behind them rose a crude sort of statue; a gigantic merperson hewn from a boulder. (432)

They create their communities in different kinds of water reservoirs, and they do not interfere in the affairs of the on-land world. Just as centaurs, merpeople have a rather difficult relationship with humans. Convinced by Dumbledore, they participate in the Triwizard Tournament but are not friendly nor helpful towards four young contestants.[164] At some point, Harry even wonders if merpeople eat human flesh (435). "Like the centaurs, the merpeople have declined "being" status in favour of that of a "beast" classification" (Rowling, 2001: 29). This sentence might be a way to show the wizards that these creatures do not need human approval to be what they want to be. Apart from all that was mentioned above, merpeople have their language – Mermish. Weil says, after Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, that if the establishment gives people the right to

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[164] Who actually were not supposed to be helped.

use language, they are going to use the language of the establishment, not their own (Weil, 2012: 3). Further on she also underlines that: "[...] many animal species possess the capabilities deemed necessary for subjectivity: self-consciousness, rational agency, the capacity to learn and transmit language" (4). In Western philosophy, as Weil recalls, the language would be one of the major factors for distinguishing a rational animal – a human, and a non-rational animal – a nonhuman (4). This does not apply to merpeople[165] who choose to use their own language, even if it causes difficulties to the wizard community. The Ministry of Magic had struggled with the decision of including them in any official discussion because their language could be understood only underwater which would cause inconveniences to witches and wizards. Real-world animals are also excluded from every human discourse because their 'language' is not known to people. However, contrary to non-human animals, there is a way to communicate with merpeople. One just has to go underwater. In the case of animals, it is impossible. Therefore, the exclusion of merpeople can be interpreted as an exclusion of a minority similar to the case of centaurs (see Chapter V).

The depiction of merewomen (and merepeople in general) in the movie adaptation of *The Goblet of Fire* from 2005, directed by Mike Newell, is particularly interesting, although quite subtle. As Harry enters the underwater kingdom, one of them stops him as he wants to break the rules. Her appearance is disturbing: sharp teeth, grey skin, scary face. It contrasts with the one Harry saw in the prefects' bathroom in the stained glass, where the mermaid was beautiful. These two images also correspond to the merewomen's voices. We can hear them singing beautifully underwater, but above it the sound of their voices is unbearable. This reverse relation of appearance and voice, both relatively acceptable by humans, reflects the dual nature of these female monsters. It also categorises them as either bad or good. They live outside of the human perspective and create rules of their own, which wizards and witches might never understand.

The transformation of a mythical siren continuous in the second decade of the 21st century. In the 2018 (and on-going) American TV-series *Siren*, creators Eric Wald and Dean White decided to go back to the name 'siren' (not 'mermaid') which may stand for regaining its ancient meaning and truly wild aspect of this creature. The series is set in a small town of legendary origin: its founder was supposed to catch and murder sirens, which makes him rather reluctant to return to this infamous story. At the beginning of the first episode, we witness a scene in which sailors

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[165]   Although the cultural image of sirens/mermaids is quite complicated because of the different cultural influences.

catch a mysterious creature[166] which is almost immediately taken over by the special services. Then the main character of the series, a young and right-wing man called Ben, a descendant of the founder of the city, meets a mysterious girl. At first, she cannot speak or walk,[167] is characterised by unusual strength, and is rather distrustful and aggressive.[168] When Ben tries to make contact with her, the girl sings and, in a sense, enchants the boy. As it turns out at the end of the episode, a water woman went ashore to find her kidnapped sister, a siren, where brutal experiments were carried out in a special military unit. Both heroines are depicted as merciless and predatory – no less than the inhabitants of the port town. The common feature of both species is emphasised by the words of the siren addressed to Ben: "I kill.... or you kill."

Ryn[169] becomes an object of fascination for Ben. His gaze is almost always directed at her and he admits he just cannot let her go, also wanting to put a tracking device on her. Madden, his girlfriend wants to persuade him out of this, understanding that Ryn trusts them and does not want to be treated as some kind of experiment (S01E04). In the same episode, Donna, Ryn's sister, breaks out of her prison, the experimental unit. As one of the researchers who had survived Donna's attack noticed, all this time people were thinking that they were studying the mermaid, whilst she was the one who was studying her torturers. This would be a crucial point in the story, also in the context of gender and feminism studies: the victim became the oppressor, she learned to survive in the hostile environment by adapting to the conditions. Even though it is not the type of narrative in which the oppressor learns not to harm women, but women learn how to survive surrounded by men. Nevertheless, at some level, the carnivore of mermaids can stand as a metaphor of women's strength and independence. The metaphor becomes even stronger when we find out that antagonist researchers want to starve all the mermaids to catch them. At this point of the story nowhere is safe, neither on land nor in the waters.

What is more, in a way, Ryn is perceived by both Ben and Madden as a sexual object. The mermaid seems to be attracted to both genders, or at least it appears so: she gives long, deep looks, she kisses Madden when she leaves home, etc. From Ryn it might not even be a manifestation of sexual desire, as she mimics most human behaviour, trying to fit in. Nonetheless, mermaids, just like the ancient sirens, are perceived as a sexual objects – not necessarily sexual subjects.

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[166] Along with fish, which in a way highlight the animalistic status if the siren.
[167] Although she adapts quickly.
[168] One of the many examples of this is the scene in which a randomly met man tries to rape her. The girl kills the man without hesitation, and then quickly forgets about the whole incident.
[169] The name the mermaid chooses for herself.

The depiction of the mermaid in *Siren* resembles another idea of the mythical sea creature presented in the Polish movie *The Lure* (Smoczyńska, 2015). Here, two mermaids want to have some fun in the human world and become singers in a disco bar. The image of two innocent girls with beautiful voices is contrasted with the depiction of the same characters as mermaids, with long sharp teeth and a fondness for eating men. Nonetheless, their appetite is not motivated by their bad intentions, but by their nature. If a mermaid falls in love with a man, she can either marry him or eat him, to avoid becoming sea foam and disappear in the waters. Just like in *Siren* mermaids of the Baltic sea are presented as wild predators that need to kill to survive. Such an image can easily become a metaphor of a woman's situation in the modern world: some must be savage and wild to endure.

Creating a link between femininity and animality by depicting fantastic female characters as dangerous and wild beasts might be an opportunity to avoid the accusations of false feminism (Kostecka, 2019: 107–110). Being a female monster would mean embracing one's exclusion, claiming monstrous attributes, and depriving one's opponent of his weaponry.

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As a sign of exclusion the siren or mermaid can stand for a lot of things: a misunderstood, dangerous, attractive, talented and definitely deadly woman. Examples of such depictions are countless. Another one would come from Polish literature for children: *Bałtycka syrena* [The Baltic Siren] by Anna Czerwińska-Rydel (2014), telling the story of Kontancja Czirenberg who, because of her musical talent (but not only), was called by the citizens of Gdańsk Baltic Siren.[170] Mermaids can also be a metaphor for disability, as in Walt Disney's *Descendants* (creat. Ortega, 2015), where the daughter of Ariel is in a wheelchair. Even if marginalised in various ways, sirens will not be silenced. As Franc Kafka (1931) reminds: "Now the Sirens have a still more fatal weapon than their song, namely their silence... someone might possibly have escaped from their singing; but from their silence, certainly never" (98). To avoid the 'siren domination,' though, I am forced to move to another female monster, fully aware of the symbolic potential of fishtails or bird wings. However, it is now time to get more acquainted with snakes.

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[170]   This case has been extensively analysed by Weronika Kostecka and Maciej Skowera (2020, 247–266).

Lonely and Cruel: Gorgons

An entry in Grimal's *Dictionary of Classical Mythology* (2008) states that there were three gorgons that lived far away near the Kingdom of the Dead (114). Only one of them was mortal, Medusa, considered to be a gorgon par excellence. There were snakes on their heads, thick fangs as of a boar, hands made of bronze and golden wings enabling them to fly. Their gaze was deadly because everybody who looked at them turned into stone. Perseus was the only one that did not fear the gorgons and was able to defeat them once and for all thanks to the fatal reflection on his polished shield. He cut off Medusa's head[171] that later was attached to Athena's shield (114).

This story is probably one of the most popular versions of the gorgon's myth.[172] But as it often happens, behind every myth there are many different versions of each story, with Medusa's not being an exception. As Grimal says, Medusa's myth transformed between prime times and in the Hellenic period (114). At first, the gorgon was simply a monster, although it is evident at this point that such a construct does not exist. Then she was considered to be the victim of a metamorphosis: Medusa was a beautiful girl who dared to compare her beauty to Athena's, especially when it came to her thick and long hair. Hybris was the greatest sin of all and Medusa did not acknowledge that when it was necessary to do so. As a punishment, the best characteristic of the gorgon was turned into snakes (114). Ultimately, Medusa was punished for her pride and vanity, and to be, to a certain extent, better than the goddesses.

In *The Greek Myths* by Robert Graves (2011) we find yet another version of the story. According to him, gorgons named Stheino, Euryale and Medusa were all beautiful. Only Medusa was punished for having sexual intercourse with Poseidon in one of Athena's temples and turned into "a winged monster with glaring eyes, huge teeth, protruding tongue, brazen claws and serpent locks, whose gaze turned men to stone" (127). The motif of Poseidon and Medusa's sexual intercourse is often interpreted as rape on a young girl (Bazylczyk, 2017: poster; cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4, 770). Hence, another potential context for the interpretation of modern retellings of Medusa's myth.

Multiple versions of gorgon's story have the same core: a punished woman and transformation from a beautiful girl to an awful monster. This is why this particular example has been specified and highlighted, as Medusa might be considered a representative of women punished by the gods who could not, in a way, stand female superiority or advantage.

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[171]   From which Pegasus and Chrysaor flew out.
[172]   In the *I'm the Monster* series this version is retold by Medusa herself.

In discussing the monstrous-feminine and its impact on popular culture Barbara Creed (2018) points out:

> Classical mythology [...] was populated with gendered monsters, many of which were female. The Medusa, with her 'evil eye,' head of writhing serpents and lolling tongue, was queen of the pantheon of female monsters; men unfortunate enough to look at her were turned immediately to stone (67).

Omitting any further Freudian analysis of Medusa's head being a metaphor of a woman's genitalia,[173] Creed's observation is quite accurate. Medusa is the queen of female monsters, especially considering her most frequent appearance in popular culture (Kulpa et al., 2020). As Liz Gloyn (2018) writes: "The Medusa [Ray Harryhausen] created for *Clash of the Titans*, the first as far as I know to be depicted with a snake's tail as well as snaky hair, has become canonical for how contemporary Western society visualises Medusa" (144). It is not the only major example of movie representations of this creature. In 1992, the mock-documentary *Medusa: Dare To Be Truthful* depicted Madonna (played by Julie Brown) as a shallow and superficial pop star, lampooning the real documentary about the singer, *Madonna: Truth or Dare*. If we go even further back in time, one of the very popular British horror movies directed by Terence Fisher was *The Gorgon* (1964) which can be considered a traditional presentation of the concept of monstrosity.

Acknowledging the great impact of Harryhausen on the image of modern monsters inspired by antiquity, Gloyn (2018) also mentions Medusa's popularity among toys, such as Lego Medusa and Barbie Doll as this creature. As she comments on the phenomenon: "This monster as not yet a monster, but her success relied on the consumer knowing she was a monster *really*" (145). For the researcher, however, Medusa is primarily "visibly monstered as a victim of sexual violence, shamed by Athena and punished by becoming horrific" (151). For this reason, I believe, Medusa might be one of the mythological monsters whose gaze not necessarily turns others to stone but provokes a reconsideration of what the feminine means, and what this character represents in works for young people. Similarly to the sirens, it is not all about physical appearance. Sirens had their deadly voice whereas Medusa has her deadly gaze.

While discussing Medusa's character in various works, also for young people (Zarzycka, 2016 poster), it is also necessary to underline her animality and the symbolic meaning of the snakes she carries on her head.[174] As Jane Caputi (2004) writes:

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[173]   Caputi (2004) also points out that "Sigmund Freud (1955b) famously linked the maternal vulva to the face of the Gorgon Medusa, the snake-haired goddess/monster of Greek myth" (327).

[174]   Which are strictly connected to the feminine.

The serpent is generally taken to be a symbol of evil, particularly through its association with the Tempter in Genesis. Yet some linguists suggest that the serpent is Eve and that together they represent the primordial goddess who gives birth to all humanity (Bennett, 1926, 607). The serpent, moreover, has a global, ancient, and honoured lineage as the "principle of life itself" and "the holiness of nature" (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1994, 845). The serpent is also the archetypical image of the human soul, the emblem of healing, the emblem of the bisexuality of divinity (that is, containing both female and male; see Hurston, 1983, 142), and the guardian of the sacred. (320)

Medusa is yet another popular representation of the female monster inspired by classical mythology that also appears in children's and young adult culture. Sometimes her contemporary descendants are not connected to the gorgon in an obvious way, as for example Madame Medusa from Disney's *The Rescuers* (dir. Reitherman et al., 1977).[175] This character, a middle-aged woman, owner of a pawn shop, and the main antagonist is driven by her desire for money and luxury,[176] especially the diamond called "Devil's Eye." Although Medusa does not have snaky hair, her gaze is hypnotising and very intimidating. Instead, her monstrosity lies in her unstable behaviour and greediness. Even though her connection to classical mythology seems vague, she certainly embodies the common idea of a 'crazy woman' with even 'crazier eyes.'

For a slightly older audience (ca. 10 year-olds), Medusa might be an example of a monstrous woman as well. However, in *Say Cheese, Medusa!* Kate McMullan (2012) presents her as a character unfairly treated by history. Medusa is a kind and lovely moon goddess who was punished by Athena[177] who was simply jealous of her hair. This is one of the rare stories revealing the origins of Medusa and presenting her rather as a mistreated girl than a monster. Nonetheless, it is problematic that this is barely a herstory, as the narration throughout the book is led by Hades, a friendly god, retelling the 'myths' that in this world are lies of Zeus, his brother (7). And at the beginning of his tale, he assures the reader that Medusa is certainly not dead,[178] but "alive and well [...] running a popular seaside spa" (8). The tragic story of Medusa is turned into a comic tale with a lot of twists, but it does not lack the monstrous tension present in the myth.

Just after the transformation of the sisters into gorgons, Po (Poseidon) and Athena call them monsters, to which Medusa responses: "Call us

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[175]   Interestingly, the actress who gave Madame Medusa her voice, Geraldine Page, was married to actor Rip Torn, who dubbed Zeus in the 1997 Disney production *Hercules*.
[176]   Her character resembles the more famous female Disney antagonist Cruella De Vil.
[177]   She puts a curse on the girl, 41-43.
[178]   Hence, not concurred by Perseus.

what you like, Athena [...]. But we know who you are. We are the daughters of Phorcys, a wise old god of the sea. We will survive, for we are also wise!" (44). After that, the sisters do not seek revenge or show their anger. They just go into hiding, waiting for the opportunity to reverse the curse (which they ultimately do). In McMullan's version of the myth, there is no inside look into Medusa's life before or after she became a monster (due to the first-person narration of Hades). Even though it is an attempt to show the 'real story' of Medusa, it is more of a tale about Hades's promise to save Perseus at all cost and how this promise creates a moral conflict in the god of death, who likes Medusa and wants to help her as well. McMullan made her story rather shallow (making Athena's motivation a hair-related issue) and lost the opportunity for a great herstory.

Medusa's depiction has certainly also changed in the animation for children. Although in the PlayStation game *Hercules* based on the Disney movie from 1997 Medusa is a monstrous antagonist, in a TV-series telling the story of young Hercules she is far from being a true monster (dir. Weinstein, 1999, S02E12). The gorgon is presented here as a young, lonely girl cursed by the gods with a deadly gaze. Acknowledged by Hades and Aphrodite, she is offered two forms of help: Hades proposes a change of looks and transformation to a human girl, while Aphrodite opposes this idea, as presumably, she thinks that there is no problem with Medusa's appearance. The goddess of love offers her special sunglasses to block her deadly gaze, while not changing who she really is.

Hercules is the one who does not surrender to prejudices and helps Medusa in her introduction to society. The excluded woman uses pink glasses given to her by Aphrodite to go on a date with a young hero. Although it is still a process of adjusting the monster to life among people, and not educating the latter about how to include a monster in society, as it should be, Disney made yet another step forward towards accepting a monster as it is.

The full assimilation of Medusa can be observed in the Walt Disney Pictures and Pixar Animation Studios movie from 2001, *Monsters Inc.* (dir. Docter). In this production, the character resembling Medusa is Celia Mae, a snake-like woman, with serpents on her head. All the monsters in the presented universe are considered normal (see Chapter I), although they differ from one another. A human being is a danger to society, a threat that comes from the outside, causing damage and death. Medusa does not turn anyone into a stone, although forgiveness of transgressions and lies does not come to her easily. The snakes on her head are her closest friends, they empathize with her and express the same emotions as the gorgon. When Celia mentions cutting her hair, the snakes panic for a minute as cutting their heads seems to be a truly drastic hairstyling procedure.

Disney's depictions of Medusa are certainly implemented in the convention of the company's aesthetics, being a part of the Culture

of Cuteness (Genosko, 2005). A different representation of the gorgons can be found in the movie *Metamorphoses*, in Japan known under the title: 星のオルフェウス, [Orpheus of the Stars], 1978,[179] directed by Takashi Masunaga and based on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In one of the episodes, similarly arranged as Disney's *Fantasia*, which was the inspiration for Masunaga,[180] Medusa is actually presented as a young girl with beautiful hair, temping Perseus to kill him.[181] When a young boy approaches the woman, she changes into a monster: we see her hairy legs, green skin, bony body, bare breasts, and, of course, deadly eyes and snakes instead of hair. Additionally, she has bat-like wings. Her appearance is thus 'over-packed with animal traits, which reaffirms the thesis of monstrous animality, strongly related to the gender representations.

In her chase after Perseus Medusa is joined by her gorgon sisters, who do not even have human faces. It is hard to determine what they actually resemble. With their goat-like legs, they look like satyrs more than gorgons. Nonetheless, as it is in Ovid's tale, Perseus defeats Medusa with his shield. Interestingly, Pegasus, supposed to have flown out of a monster's head, was actually reborn from a monster's snakes, with the body of a flying horse and a serpent's head. Pegasus becomes Perseus' friend immediately and helps him to escape the gorgon sisters. Then they fly into the sky and become star constellations.

In *Metamorphosis* gorgons are presented with animal traits, but it is also vital that the monster bodies are still those of women. Saggy breasts and stomachs, protruding ribs, and dry skin constitute the depiction of a woman's body that is anything but ideal. It is monstrous in the literal understanding of the word.

In the case of Medusa from *Class of the Titans* (dir. Goodchild, 2006, S01, E09, "Sibling Rivalry")[182] we also have a depiction of a woman's body colliding with the common idea of it that would be accepted by social standards: very masculine, with spots, almost no hair but a few snakes on the top of her head.

As Judith Butler (2018) rightly points out:

> As soon as we are failed by an ordinary and accepted cultural perception, when it is impossible to read the bodies we see with full conviction, we lose confidence whether we have the body of a woman or a man in front

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[179]   In 1979 it was released under a new title: *Winds of Change*.
[180]   Instead of classical music, the soundtrack was composed with rock music hits by Joan Baez, Mick Jagger, et al. Although the movie was supposed to be a rock answer to *Fantasia*, it was not very successful.
[181]   Similarly to sirens.
[182]   *The Class of Titans* is a Canadian animated TV-series about a group of teenagers, descendants of the ancient gods, saving the world from the mythological monsters.

of us. Our own hesitation between these categories is the experience of this body. (28)

Gender uncertainty is part of Medusa's monstrosity. The confusion aroused in the protagonists might be the factor of the monster's victory. Nonetheless, as it often happens in texts for children, there is no place for doubt or provocation. Medusa, released from the Underground gains freedom, to get imprisoned again almost immediately. As we find out, Medusa's snake communicates with her telepathically, which points to the potential of communicating with other gorgons too, which causes yet another threat.

Suspicions of the telepathic communication system turn out to be true, as the two other gorgon sisters find out about Medusa's imprisonment. They decide to swim to the surface,[183] one of them saying: "It's time the modern world learns what it's like to stare into the face of evil – even if it's the last time they'll ever see." All gorgons are presented as evil and old female monsters love mischief and hate humans. In the end, it turns out that they also hate each other, and the titled "sibling rivalry" becomes the reason for their failure.

Gorgons are rarely presented as men, yet two examples are worth mentioning due to their exceptional character. The first would be Medusa from the TV animated series *Conan the Adventurer*, presented without a doubt as a man and an antagonist, rather easily defeated by Conan.[184] The other one comes from the world of dolls and the animated series *Monster High*. One of the students, Deuce, is Medusa's son. He is the most popular guy in school, resembling the jock type of student from almost every American high-school movie. Deuce is kind and friendly, and his deadly look – thanks to protective sunglasses – is not a threat to other students. In Monster High none of the monsters is treated as a 'freak,' as everyone is considered to be one.

There are numerous depictions of Medusa in popular culture. The ones that I am consciously omitting come from comic books, such as Marvel[185] or DC universes, filled with mythological plots and monsters. But there is one particular case of Medusa that deserves to be analysed separately, as it belongs to a very complicated and very mythological world, the universe of Rick Riordan's classical retellings.

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[183]   They live in the underworld.
[184]   Similarly, a male Medusa antagonist appears in the animated series *MiniForce* (S01E11).
[185]   There Medusa has 'magical' hair, which does not look like snakes. She is also a protagonist.

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In *The Lighting Thief* (2005) Rick Riordan balances between the popular representations of Medusa being a monster and the mythological depiction of a woman who has been punished by the gods. When the main protagonists of the series, Percy, Annabeth and Grover, start their quest to find the lighting stolen from Olympus, they stop at "Aunty Em's Garden Gnome Emporium," a warehouse surrounded by stone statues.[186] Lured in by the smell of hamburgers, they meet the mysterious woman:

> [...] the door creaked open, and standing in front of us was a tall Middle Eastern woman – at least I assumed she was Middle Eastern, because she wore a long black gown that covered everything but her hands, and her head was completely veiled. Her eyes glinted behind a curtain of black gauze, but that was about all I could make out. Her coffee-colored hands looked old, but well-manicured and elegant, so I imagined she was a grandmother who had once been a beautiful lady. (172)

The woman invited the children to her house for dinner. Despite their doubts, hunger and the impulsive character of demi-gods pushed them into a trap. The smell of food was also hypnotising. Percy says: "The aroma was like laughing gas in the dentist's chair – I made everything else go away" (173). As he continues:

> All I cared about was finding the dining area. And sure enough, there it was at the back of the warehouse, a fast-food counter with a grill, a soda fountain, a pretzel heater, and a nacho cheese dispenser. Everything you could want, plus a few steel picnic tables out front. (174)

The description of the food and the figure of Aunt Em alluded more to the motif from the folk-tale *Hansel and Gretel* by the Grimm Brothers than to the myth about Medusa. An old woman living in a remote area, luring children into her house with food would awaken obvious associations. It changes after Aunt Em tells her story.

> "You make these statues yourself?" I asked.
> "Oh, yes. Once upon a time, I had two sisters to help me in the business, but they have passed on, and Aunty Em is alone. I have only my statues. This is why I make them, you see. They are my company." The sadness in her voice sounded so deep and so real that I couldn't help feeling sorry for her. (176)

Here, the connection to the mythical story of Medusa is getting stronger. Not only the recollection of two other sisters appears but also

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[186]   "The front lot was a forest of statues: cement animals, cement children, even a cement satyr playing the pipes" [...] (Riordan, 2005: 172).

emotions elicited in her story refer to that of the mythological Medusa: a young girl doomed by the gods and forced to be lonely. When Annabeth asks about the two sisters, Aunty Em replies:

> It's a terrible story [...] Not for children, really. You see, Annabeth, a bad woman was jealous of me, long ago, when I was young. I had a... a boyfriend, you know, and this bad woman was determined to break us apart. She caused a terrible accident. My sisters stayed by me. They shared my bad fortune as long as they could, but eventually they passed on. They faded away. I alone have survived, but at a price. Such a price. (176)

Aunt Em's story refers to the one known from Greek mythology and the conflict with Athena. Medusa was raped in Athena's temple by Poseidon and punished by the goddess for desecration.[187] She was punished by Athena, who here is the mother of Annabeth. That is why Aunt Em tells the story directly to the girl, meanwhile underlining the grey colour of her eyes.[188] That insinuates Medusa's ultimate revenge: the child of a goddess will answer for her mother's sin.

At this moment Aunt Em starts to reveal her true self. She asks the children to pose for a picture.[189] When she is about to take off her veil, the young heroes dodged out of the way and saw only some parts of the woman's transformation. Her hands "[...] turned gnarled and warty, with sharp bronze talons for fingernails" and they started to hear small snakes moving around (179). When she was about to attack, she changed from a miserable woman into a dangerous monster, from Aunt Em to Medusa, from a figure of loneliness to a figure of death.

Her looks and behaviour changed but not her voice, as Percy noted: "[...] she didn't sound anything like a monster" (180). She still tried to seduce children and make them look into her eyes. The previously mentioned hypothesis confirms itself now, as Medusa says:

> The Grey-Eyed One did this to me, Percy [...] Annabeth's mother, the cursed Athena, turned me from a beautiful woman into this [...] You see why I must destroy the girl, Percy. She is my enemy's daughter. I shall crush her stature to dust. (180)

There is no 'human' side to Medusa's character now. As Annabeth points out: "Medusa is a menace. She's evil" (181). Aunt Em was not supposed to be killed, but Medusa is just another monster for Percy to eliminate, just like it was for his mythological namesake, Perseus. After cutting off her head, the children took it as protection and a possible weapon in their

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[187]   Grimal, 2008: 114. Unlike Dorota Bazylczyk (2017, poster), I would not expect a recollection of this motif.
[188]   Athena was called Grey-eyed.
[189]   "Children are so popular, you see. Everyone loves children." (177)

future battles. There is no pity in killing the monster: its role was that of an antagonist that later simply turned into that of an object, a weapon. Except for a glimpse of the depth of Medusa's character when Percy sees her loneliness and misery, with the background of a story known from classical mythology, she remains a monster, existing to be killed by a hero.

The depiction of Aunt Em changed in the movie from 2010 directed by Chris Columbus. Medusa, played by Uma Thurman, is shown as a beautiful, seductive woman. It is quite interesting that due to the change of the medium the creators decided to show her character as beautiful instead of hideous. Here, Columbus exploited the concept of the 'dangerous beauty,' which seems to be the modern Hollywood trend: monstrous female or female monsters can be even hard to spot, as they are no longer ugly, which already was sometimes a trend in antiquity. The monstrosity of Aunt Em is, in both texts, expressed by her loneliness, particularly regarding her being single and without any children of her own. Those elements also characterised witches, persecuted between the 15th and 18th century in Eastern Europe, and also in America (Chollet, 2019). Medusa could be classified as one, excluded from society, a female treated like a monster. Today, in 2020, monstrous women serve as figures of feminism, embodying independence and freedom. For Riordan and Columbus in the previous decade, they were still characters destined to be destroyed.

Medusa is a subject of pop-cultural metamorphosis. From simply being a threatening monster she can transform into a misunderstood child, a vulnerable teenager (see Chapter VI) or a *femme fatale* seeking revenge. Interestingly, there is another cultural figure that Medusa merges with, i.e. a mother. In looking for an answer as to why Medusa became a symbol of motherhood in children's culture, three strategies will be presented in the following examples, showing how this idea is introduced in the different media.

The first Medusa that realises the concept of motherhood comes from *The Powerpuff Girls* (S01E01, 1998). The episode begins with the depiction of the Professor, the Powerpuff Girls creator and father, being lonely and depressed. Luckily, the next day in the supermarket he bumps into a perfectly nice and beautiful lady who 'hypnotizes' the man.[190] While the Professor is left speechless, the girls take over and arrange a date with Ima Goodlady, as she introduces herself.

After the date, Ima immediately is introduced to their home to 'help out' with her 'female touch.' When the girls oppose such a necessity, Ima changes into a strict and demanding woman, who does not let them fly around and save the town anymore. Gradually, she becomes more and

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[190] She has extremely large eyes and the voice-over comments: "Direct hit, Cupid," which implies classical references.

more possessive, taking control of the house affairs. Ima is also aggressive and forces the girls to clean the house without the use of their powers: as ' normal girls.' She also completely dominates the Professor who agrees with her in every matter. Ultimately, the children are grounded and Ima achieves her goal.

With the girls stuck in the house, Ima sneaks out and steals the mayor's jewellery. When she is back, the Powerpuff Girls compromise her disguise and fake identity. Bubbles takes off her wig and Ima Goodlady is transformed into Sedusa, her hair imitating a snake's movements and sounds. The hair can also fight back and grab objects (or people), as having 'a life of its own.' Being ultimately defeated, Sedusa comes out plainly as a villain and a bad mother-figure, stereotypically depicting all that is associated with 'daddy's new wife' and 'the new mommy,' that is evil and only wants to destroy the family harmony.

In *Mythopolis* by Alexandra Májová (2013) family harmony is to be destroyed by another mythical creature. In this Czech animation, Medusa is the protagonist and the mother of little minotaur, Mino.[191] They live in Mythopolis, a city inhabited by mythological creatures, settled in the reality of a modern environment. Medusa and Mino live in a small apartment in the suburbs. Although there is no mention of the father, he is to be found. Medusa looks for a perfect partner, for her child rather than for herself. At the beginning of the animation, she first prepares a meal for Mino, then she gets ready for a date with an obnoxious satyr. When he comes for dinner, he behaves in a primitive manner and wants to punish Mino for playing a joke on him. When Medusa sees that, she takes off her pink glasses and turns the unwanted admirer into stone. The satyr joins her collection of statues in the basement and ultimately makes Medusa wonder if she will ever find the right father for Mino.

Here Medusa's hair plays a different role than in *The Powerpuff Girls*. As the character is rather positive, snakes do not endanger anyone: they pose as an extension of Medusa, they help her in the kitchen and when she is putting on her make-up. Medusa is presented in the animation as a positive mother figure[192] who, unlike Sedusa, is ready to sacrifice everything for her child's well-being. In Townsville, it is the Professor who feels lonely and wants a partner. In Mythopolis Medusa, despite her plausible longing for romantic love, pushes that aside and – at the end – choses the prefect father for Mino. It is not clear whether she is attracted to him or not, but she definitely appears as a more dramatic character than a monstrous or evil one.

Strong maternal feelings are also present in the Belgian picture book: *Mère Méduse* by Kitty Crowther (2014). It begins with a marvellous birth,

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[191]   It is not determined whether it is a boy or a girl.
[192]   She also works as a nurse.

but not of a monster, as in the previous cases. It is Medusa who is about to give birth to a child, on a night when the wind is unusually strong and the moon has this special glow (2). It is a human child, or at least looks like one: a girl named Irisée. Medusa is presented as an overprotective mother who hides her baby from the world in her thick and long hair, which in the previous cases had a life of its own. Even though at the beginning it is not clear whether the hair is in fact snakes,[193] it can grab things as well as people, play with Irisée, feed her, teach her the alphabet, etc. As the girl grows older, Medusa starts to notice her need to participate in other children's lives and activities, also in attending school. Although Medusa teaches Irisée how to read,[194] the little girl longs to be part of the educational experience. Although Mere Meduse resists the idea at the beginning, she eventually gives in and allows her daughter to go to school. When she picks her up, her long, 'monstrous' hair is gone and she reunites not only with her daughter but also with society.

Here and also in the previous examples, the significance of Medusa's hair seems to be crucial to the story. Before the appearance of Irisée, the hair covers Medusa's face completely. As a character, **she is the hair**, tangled, wild, and very much alive. It certainly represents protection for the child: Medusa compares Irisée to a pearl, and herself to a nacre that protects its insides from any harm (13). These sea-references are certainly not the only ones: women live at the seashore, among sea-like creatures and plants. The allusion to the animal, medusa, is also clear, as those creatures appear in the inner-covers of the book. However, they are not the only keys to interpreting the work.

The ancient reference is still visible in the book. Medusa is isolated from society, but not necessarily by other people. She seems to be untrusting[195] and overprotective, not only of her child but also of herself. There is a possibility that the reason for her isolation is her 'monstrous' hair, and probably that is why she hides Irisée's hair under a bonnet. That is until the end when she picks up Irisée from school: the mother's hair is shorter and her figure is visible, whereas Irisée's hair is released from her cap. Now they pose as mirrored characters with similar hair, integrated with society and trustful towards each other. The very last pages of the book show a snake shoal that is the same colour as Medusa's hair, hence the ancient tradition is still in the narrative. Answering the question where Medusa's hair went, we read:

> After being cut,
> it has been transformed

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[193]   The hair is blond, messy, but still human; it just move like snakes.
[194]   She becomes very good at it.
[195]   In the book we do not know the reason for it.

into adorable little sea snakes.
Gone to join the Gulf Stream. (38)[196]

Medusa's monstrosity is indeed closely connected to nature and animals. However, it is above all related to motherhood and the sickening need to protect her child at all cost. Her identity is lost in the story, as she is, first of all, a mother. Even on the cover Medusa seems to be less important than her child placed in the foreground, entangled in monstrous hair, representing an unhealthy need to protect the child

This specific motif of a mother's hair appears in several other works for children. Seemingly, the basic example would be *Rapunzel* by the Grimm Brothers, interpreted as a story about a mother-daughter relationship and dependency, with a strong reference to hair. The movie *Tangled* (2010) by Walt Disney Animation Studios (dir. Sandoval, et al.), based on the Grimm tale, explores the importance of the hair even further, as here it has magical qualities and becomes a bargaining tool. Another example exploring the motif of entanglement would be *Håret til Mamma* (2007) by Gro Dahle and Svein Nyhus,[197] where the tangled title hair represents depression, with the child being part of the illness. Hair is a symbol of care, concern, but also an excessive need to protect the child.[198]

As the selected examples present, the figure of Mother Medusa can be exploited in various ways. Just like in the Grimm Brothers' tales, the mother should not be evil,[199] whereas Sedusa barely becomes the Professor's partner, and she is as evil as can be. In *Mythopolis* and *Mere Meduse* Medusa as a mother is tender, caring and overprotective, but also utterly concentrated on her child rather than on herself. Her subjectivity is in a way lost in motherhood, which becomes an obsession. In those texts, the loneliness of serpent monsters is not exploited to any further extent.

The last Medusa related example does not come from popular culture but presents an important issue omitted in the previous texts. *Reflection* is another short animation, created by Patricia Satjawatcharaphong (2007). It begins with a quote from "Phaedrus (40 A.D.)":

Things are not always what they seem;
outward form deceives many;
rare is the mind that discerns

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[196]   „Après avoir été coupés,/ ils se sont transformés/ en adorables petits serpents de mer./ Partis rejoindre le *Gulf Stream*" (Crowther, 2014: 38).
[197]   "Mother's Hair," no English translation.
[198]   The contexts cited are only part of the symbolic representation of hair. Many other tropes can be found, for example, in the study by Kazimierz Banek *Opowieść o włosach* [A Story About Hair] (2010) or in the entry *Włosy* [Hair] in *Słownik polskiej bajki ludowej* [Dictionary of Polish Folk Tale] (Wróblewska, 2018).
[199]   That is why in the early versions they substituted the figures of evil mothers with step-mothers.

what is carefully concealed within.

Afterwards, the animation takes us to a cave, where Medusa, a young girl, with no snake hair this time, looks at the statue of her 'creation' with sadness and anger. The only one that she smiles at is a man, reaching for her hand. He evokes happy memories, supposedly of a romantic character, as in her dreams Medusa takes him to a mythological goddess to be wedded. The goddess however kills her dream and puts a curse on the young lovers. Medusa walks away to her chambers and sits in front of the mirror. Then, she takes a wipe and as if removing her make-up, she reveals her 'true face:' older, green skin, narrow red eyes, but with the same sadness and real tears. Snakes appear on her head instead of her hair and she becomes the Medusa people know, not a young girl. What increases the misery of this character is the fact that she looks in the mirror, and does not turn into stone, which implies that even if the depression led her to the decision of committing suicide, it was not a solution available to her.

Here, the animation ends. Satjawatcharaphong certainly was inspired by the Greek myth of Medusa, as at the beginning she presents her 'true' story. Also, her monstrosity is, as the quote suggests, something that lies only on the surface of this character. Real unhappiness is within and the burden of many monsters is loneliness. We do not find this motif in the works for a younger audience, but its presence in the contemporary Medusa-related works is maybe one of the most accurate ones.

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In the analysed cases monstrous gender is each time a sign of exclusion. It is not only a matter of presenting a certain character in a book or movie. It is also the audience, with their own idea of men and women, who expect certain behaviours and looks from the heroes and heroines they encounter. This concerns monsters as well. Their motives and needs are brought down to cultural gender expectations and only sometimes do they manage to oppose them through their monstrosity. Maybe it is even more likely for a monster to break a gender pattern, as it is, after all, a shapeshifter that constantly escapes human categories. For a child growing up and not knowing their gender, or struggling with their identity during adolescence, monsters might come in handy, showing that gender patterns are not fluent, with the option of becoming 'a monster' as well. As Elizabeth Hale (2016) underlines, monsters of classical myths "provide profound connections to issues of identity, coming of age, and finding one's place in the world" (online). More precisely, they also help to find one's place in the culture that everyone participates in. It might be resourceful, it might be scary, and I dare to say, it might be monstrous as well.

CHAPTER IV:
THE MONSTROUS DISABILITY

Figure 4: The Minotaur — a monster hidden from human sight

The Birth of a 'Freak'

A mythological figure corresponding to the concept of disability would certainly be Hephaestus (Kelley, 2007: 35). According to Pierre Grimal (1997), the god of fire was Zeus's and Hera's son, although versions describing his actual origins are not entirely consistent. According to some sources, Hera was the only parent of Hephaestus, which she conceived out of fury towards Zeus, who had created Athena all by himself. That version, however, giving multiple possibilities of interpretations, is not ultimate. Some sources give Hephaestus illegitimate fathers or present other sorts of conflicts between Hera and Zeus. Nevertheless, one element of the mythical story is coherent, i.e. Hephaestus was a person with a disability (119).

The reason for his disability that appears to be most popular is connected to the above-mentioned conflict between Hera and Zeus. During one of the fights, Hephaestus ought to have taken Hera's side which made Zeus very angry. The god took Hephaestus by his leg and threw him from Olympus. After a long fall, which lasted a day, the god of fire became permanently injured and could walk only with the help of "golden leg-supports" (Graves, 2011: 87). However, according to Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Hephaestus was 'crippled' from birth. He had been thrown from Olympus by Hera, who was disgusted and embarrassed of her son's 'pitiful appearance' (Graves, 2011: 86–87). He was saved and raised by water goddesses with no "bodily damage" (87). a way of revenge was the creation of a golden throne for his mother, which imprisoned anyone who sat on it. Hera, as one of the tempted goddesses, sat on it and had to ask her imperfect son for help. She invited him back to Olympus, where he remained one of the 'permanent' gods.

Besides being an "ugly and ill-tempered" god of fire (87), Hephaestus was famous for his skills as a blacksmith and his knowledge concerning any kind of metal. He was the one who crafted the most incredible pieces for heroes.[200] He also "made a set of golden mechanical women to help him in his smithy" (87), which proves him to be not only a great inventor but also a pioneer of artificial intelligence and technology.[201]

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[200]   Inter alia Achilles's armour, Aphrodite's girdle, Heracles' clappers, etc.

[201]   Golden mechanical women could talk, "and undertake the most difficult tasks he entrusts to them" (Graves, 2011: 87). For more about the relations of technology and classical antiquity and similar motifs, see Adrienne Mayour, *Gods and Robots: Myths, Machines and Ancient Dreams of Technology* (2018).

Another famous motif would be his relationship with Aphrodite, goddess of beauty, which seems like a mockery aimed at his physical appearance, just like in Browning's *Freak show* where the beautiful woman Cleo had a romance with a deformed man, Hans. Hephaestus was also the creator of Pandora and chains for Prometheus, with which he was chained to Tartarus. In the end, he is most likely perceived as the ugliest of gods who has the most skills, the Lame One of Many Devices.

If we consider Hephaestus to be an excluded god: ugly, crippled, representing the working class, he might also be perceived as a monstrous god living on Olympus. Reintroduced to young readers in many forms,[202] he is frequently presented as an isolated god, more human, one whom we may relate to as having 'real people's problems.' Such an example can be found in the *Beasts of Olympus* series by Lucy Coats. The protagonist of the story, Demon, son of Pan, who was also excluded for being a half-satyr, half-child, becomes Hephaestus' friend and sort of apprentice. a divine blacksmith is not like the rest of the gods and goddesses who are arrogant, cruel and selfish. He often helps Demon and gives him all sorts of advice. Not only the character itself settles the connection between classical mythology and Coats's story. In the first book, Demon is introduced by Hephaestus to his 'help,' that is robots:

> One of my automaton robots, [...] I made it a while ago to help in the forge. Not much for chatting, but it's great at keeping the heat steady. I've got lots of different kinds. Useful creatures, these robots. (Coats, 2015a: 19–20)

Just like in antiquity, here we are also introduced to the concept of new technologies developed by Hephaestus. He poses as an inventor, excluded genius, ignored by powerful gods and accepted only by a child, which highlights the potential to create child–monster relationship within the group of the excluded (see Chapter VI). What is more, Hephaestus made the bulls he calls 'automatons,' which also points to the post-human – or rather post-animal – approach to science and its relation to Nature (Coats, 2015d: 33). Being a tale of exclusion as a whole, *Beasts of Olympus* brings the example of Hephaestus as one of many beasts with disabilities, who find their abilities more special than restraining.[203]

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[202] Holub, Williams (2015), *Heroes in Training: Hephaestus and the Island of Terror* (series of books for children); O'Connor (2019), *Olympians: Hephaistos: God of Fire* (series of comic books).

[203] Demon and beasts are clearly perceived by gods and goddesses as lesser creatures. Many of the mythical animals are injured, Demon himself also faces many health-related difficulties. Besides being constantly bitten and scratched, in the beginning of *Centaur School* (part five), Demon deals with his own disability: he can't properly write down notes on animals and he needs special opticles made by Hephaestus. (Coats, 2016a: 10).

Hephaestus could be considered the god of all people with disabilities. Some heroes, like Heracles, often serve as a helping tool to work with children and young adults on their challenges. Others, like Perseus, became an ultimate inspiration to create whole book series that tells a story of a dyslectic and hyperactive boy, whose disorders turned out to be his biggest strength. That is why it will become the core of this chapter presenting beasts with disabilities, monsters that often scare only to be safe. But first, it is necessary to recall briefly the history of monstrous disability.[204]

Medical Monstrosity

Coming back to the basic definition of monstrosity it might be claimed that cultural constructs of monstrosity and disability correspond to each other in a very vivid way. If a monster might be someone or something that lacks a certain body part, has something more than they should or in general looks different from the majority, people with body deformations or permanent sickness are also very often considered by society as monsters – 'freaks,' to look at and examine. As Anna Wieczorkiewicz (2009) rightfully points out:

> Societies work out various ways to let people get used to the vision of anomaly, or otherness, by putting them in the wider systems of concepts and values. Nowadays a handy category would be sickness. Medical discourse lets us name the problem, and also points to its solution. We also have social institutions whose goal is to prevent marginalising some individuals. (13)

Entangled in medicinal discourse, it is crucial to stress that disability, perceived and constructed by culture, is not a separate doctrine of science. At least, it should not be. Its 'monstrous' side very often determines how a person with disability copes with their sickness and is received by society. What is more, it also shows 'normal' people how to respond to concepts of various disabilities, educates them and familiarises the concept for whom it is alien. Not discussing all the examples that exist and the many topics concerning disabilities, it is however necessary to stress that the level of inclusivity is also reflected in popular culture that certainly does not introduce as many characters with disabilities as it maybe should. However, that is changing, especially in youth culture, often with some help from classical antiquity.

In their article *Disability in Ancient Times* Gabriela Nowińska and Jakub Nowiński (2014) write that: "In the past, an attitude of hostility and even

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[204]   This character comes back many times in Susan Deacy's project, updated on the blog on Mythology and Autism: http://myth-autism.blogspot.com/ (access: 14.02.2020).

aversion to the disabled were the major force" and that "[i]n ancient times, everything that was different was explained as a *Force Majeure* intervention, as punishment coming from [the] Gods" (120). Children with disabilities were killed in the name of "natural selection" (120) or abandoned in forests, mountains, or thrown into the waters (120).[205] The only polis that treated people with disabilities with some dignity was Athens, which all things considered still presents the ancient world as a hostile place, where youth, strength and beauty were celebrated and required (120–121). Although methods varied in every district or land, the conclusion seems unified: people with disabilities were unwanted in ancient society and were exterminated as soon as it was possible (cf. Laes, 2016).

The Nowińskis also claim that: "In Greece the disabled and animals with serious deformations were called 'taras' [sic]. This was the term for mythological monsters" (121). Such an observation exemplifies how all excluded groups are connected. If we turn to the writings of Peter Singer (*Practical Ethics*, orig. 1979, 2017) we would be forced to acknowledge the same comparison, as in a utilitarian spirit the philosopher equalizes the usefulness of people with disabilities and non-human animals, i. e. in scientific experiments. Even though this is not the topic of this book, it is necessary to highlight the connection between people with disabilities and that of animals in the world of culture.

Such an approach to disability[206] did not change in Europe for a very long time. Children with disabilities were perceived as a punishment from God or a special task, a burden sent for people's sins. Through many changes and historical intricacies that I will not here attempt to unravel, although culture came to the point where monstrosity/disability started to be treated as something fascinating, it was still not accepted as 'normal.' Analysing monsters from different periods and examining those concepts within different traditions, Wieczorkiewicz (2009) does not omit the story of 'freaks' and 'human curiosities,' put on display for general amusement. A 'freak' carries a certain stigma, and for Wieczorkiewicz this term is 'irritating,' unsuitable (278). Freak shows were especially popular in America between 1840 and the late 1940s,[207] with various intensities (Bogdan, 1990: 2). However, even if not named one, 'freaks'

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[205]   This motif might be even noticed in classical mythology, where many heroes 'to be,' were left in the wild, as 'unwanted children.'

[206]   That varied in different parts of the ancient world.

[207]   In *Handbook of Disability Studies* we read that: "exploitation of people with disabilities in the United States served to reinforce average Americans' notions of their own normality, by emphasising disability and often race as profound and monstrous differences. Freak shows served to institutionalise notions of disability as the ultimate deviance, thus solidifying Americans' needs to perceive themselves as normal" (Braddock, Parish, 2001: 38).

lived within different societies for centuries.[208] As late as at the end of the 20th century, Robert Bogdan (1990) claimed that the study of freak shows "have remained in the hands of circus buffs and a few nonconformists in the humanities" (2), while today we have numerous publications on this subject.[209] Even though some researchers treat the study of 'freak shows' and the study of teratology separately, those methods often intersect (Cockford, 2012: 113). In this book, I include 'freaks' in the monster discourse and treat them as one variation of monstrosity.

After analysing the movie *Freaks* (Tod Browning, 1932),[210] Wieczorkiewicz (2009) explains the American context accompanying the movie's release. In the USA, the possibility to cure physical deformations was almost accomplished. What is more, issues that emerged after the First World War, among many others, former soldiers' injuries, had a meaningful influence on the general view on disabilities in culture. But what was probably most crucial in creating this image was the care for the right 'genetic pool' to which any king of 'abnormality' was perceived as a social threat (282) – just like in antiquity. Those fears correspond to the idea of a 'freak' being a threat to society.

Recalled by Wieczorkiewicz (2009: 288), Rachel Adams (2001) claimed:

> Freaks are powerful symbols of a common anxiety that underneath the apparent normality of our bodies we are as divided as the conjoined twins, as fragmented as the human torso, as excessive as the fat person. When freaks disappear from popular culture, other monsters will come to replace them. This model is most extensively developed by Leslie Fiedler's Freaks, in which the extraordinary body becomes a signifier for the author's "secret self." It is also a key feature of psychoanalytic readings in which the disabled body stirs unconscious responses in the viewer based on her fears about her own bodily integrity. (84–85)

What is more, according to Leslie Fiedler (1987), the author of *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self*, also mentioned by Wieczorkiewicz

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[208]   'Human curiosity' was a term used instead of the word 'freak,' among others in Burnum and Bailey's circus in 1903.

[209]   To name just a few: Bogdan (1990) *Freak show: presenting human oddities for amassment and profit*; Kérchy, Zittlau (2012) *Exploring the Cultural History of Continental European Freak Shows and 'Enfreakment'*; Thomson (1996), *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*.

[210]   Browning's movie was not well received. As Wieczorkiewicz (2009) writes: "When in 1932 Browning's work was screened, it caused such indignation that it was quickly withdrawn from the mainstream. It is a terrifying catalogue of monstrosities – it was written with disgust, seeing in the old peculiarities and miracles the disability, illness and underdevelopment. Moreover, the scenery brought to mind the beginnings of the cinema, which – although still treated as entertainment not of the highest quality – had certain artistic aspirations. On the other hand, the freak shows were in decline, considered to be something in bad taste. Thus, Tod Browning initiated a mode of entertainment that was being removed from cultural memory" (291).

(2009), the fear that a human being experiences in contact with people with extraordinary bodies come from the fear for oneself (288). Additionally, as Ally Crockford (2012) states:

> Unlike enfreakment, which exists outside of the physicality of the freak's own body, the medical concept of "monstrosity" that appears with increasing frequency in nineteenth-century medical journals is explicitly tied to physical deformity. However, medical monsters are similarly bonded to an act of looking; in this case, they are not the product of the collective public gaze, but the medical. It is true that many exceptionally bodied individuals who exhibited themselves in Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States also found themselves the subjects of medical reports. Still, despite this parallel grounding, the process of enfreakment itself is typically seen as lacking in nineteenth-century medical reports of so-called "monstrosities." (112–113)

Acknowledging the historical context of medical monsters, it is vital to stress that those creatures appearing in popular culture are something in between "ludic and mocking discourse and scientific discourse" (Wieczorkiewicz, 2009: 288). As Wieczorkiewicz also underlines: "The rejection of abnormality and the reversal of normality exists in a dialectic relationship" (288). Freak shows and medical shows are connected by the similarity of approaching the object of the gaze, which lacks subjectivity and is only a specimen, something to examine, to look at and gain entertainment or/and knowledge. At the same time, medical monsters enter the field of traditionally perceived social exclusion, which does not allow the individual to participate in the economic, political and social life of a certain community (Giddens, 2006: 738, after Wieczorkiewicz, 2009: 325). As that argument also applies to other excluded groups analysed in this book, I will now take a closer look at characters with disabilities in youth culture to present contemporary tendencies and depictions of contemporary beasts.

Disability in Youth Culture

Although maybe not many, 'crippled,' or 'sick' monsters appear in 21st-century youth culture more and more often. Disability studies are also a relevantly young discipline (Goodley, 2011; Shakespeare, 2013; after Traustadóttir, et al. 2015: 3; Preston, 2010: 56). As the authors of *Childhood and Disability in the Nordic Countries* underline:

> Most research on childhood and disability is framed within special education or rehabilitation, often taking a biomedical and individualistic approach. The dominant perspective has been medical, viewing disability as an abnormality of the individual child. (Traustadóttir, et al. 2015: 3)

The above authors also point out that the study of disability was neglected for many years (15) in the same way as the disability itself was overlooked. As David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder (2001) indicate:

> As instructional tales, Victorian children's literature reveals a penchant for discussing disability in terms of individual responsibility and the need for charity toward the infirm. Nineteenth-century authors sought to mitigate social readings of malignancy by enfolding disabled children within a paternalistic cultural logic of financial and moral benevolence. (202)

This observation also correlates with the depiction of monsters in the Victorian era. Children as little monsters that must be tamed, with bodies that are not yet formed, can pose as both mythical and creatures with disbalities. Children are inhuman, or not yet human – up to the 20th century at least (see Chapter VI). Traustadóttir et. al (2015) also underline the fact that the discussion around disability originates from the definition concerning what it means to be 'normal':

> By viewing childhood as a sequence of measurable stages towards adulthood, classical child development theories established a rigorous definitional framework of what it means to be a 'normal' child as well as marking the boundaries of deviation from developmental norms, thereby creating the view of many disabled children as having an 'abnormal' development. The discourses of 'normal child development' and 'normal life course' have had a significant impact on the lives of disabled children and adults [...] and help to understand why they continue to be identified as a social problem in many contexts. (16–17)

Such a perspective corresponds to the concept of monstrosity as being something contradictory to what is 'normal.' This also applies to youth culture. This issue is additionally included in childhood discourse in which for a very long time children were something incomplete in terms of humanity: they were 'becoming' humans, which were considered 'beings' (17). This observation creates yet another connection to concepts developed by Rowling concerning magical creatures, presented in Chapter II.

The issue of disability in children's literature was also analysed within Polish research. Some researchers make crucial, yet still universal, remarks on the topic. As Alicja Fidowicz (2016) writes: "People with disabilities have occupied various social niches in every civilisation, sometimes arousing extreme feelings" (111). Analysing Polish literature for young people in the 19th century, she comes to the conclusion that different kinds of disability, mostly assigned to male characters, were equated with poverty (118) and associated with lack of knowledge.[211] But one should not forget that at the

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[211]   An example she alludes to is one of the characters' lectures given to children, which stands for an allegory of ignorance (115). Fidowicz recalls the parable: *Ślepy* ["The Blind"]

same time such kind of disability as blindness, especially in the romantic period of Polish literature, was associated with higher powers, prophecies and 'seeing beyond' (Kasperek, 2017), which calls for not only legendary but strictly mythological connections, only to mention Homer who was also supposedly blind.

In the 1990s, the newly developing disability studies did not only have to create its methodology but also concur myths concerning the disability of children and adults, which were filled with stereotypes and unfair treatment (20). According to Daniel L. Preston (2010), there are two major models in disability studies: medical and social. The former "focus on a physical difference of the body," whilst the latter "seeks to 'normalize'" the population identified in its ranks (56). According to earlier invoked researchers:

> Instead of understanding disability as an individual problem, disability studies directs attention on the social, cultural, economic and political aspects of disability, and examines how social attitudes and cultural images create and recreate disability. (Traustadóttir, et al. 2015: 20)

What is more, as Preston (2010) highlights:

> Disability as a single concept [...] becomes just as difficult and complicated to define as the concepts we now identify as race, gender, sexual identity, and ethnicity. This places disability on equally important and interesting terms with the other identity categories. (56)

When discussing the cultural concept of disability in texts for young people, it is worth noticing the visible tendency of a higher standard of works that address disability, even if, as Marion Rana (2017) claims, "[c]haracters with disability are still significantly underrepresented" (26). Although most cases would probably concern the 21st century, some traditions should not be ignored. Mythological motifs containing disability topics will be presented in the following subchapter. But what is also worth stressing is that within oral tradition, especially in folk and fairy tales, characters with disabilities were very often present. In the Grimm Brothers' tales, for example, we meet many blind characters who, traditionally, had the power to see beyond/the future, who were injured or cursed, which often was a consequence of bad behaviour (*Cinderella*), who were 'crippled' since birth and against all odds became a hero (*Hans My Hedgehog*), etc. Also in a literary fairy tale, we find multiple examples of characters with disabilities. One such character would be *The Steadfast Tin Soldier* by Hans Christian Andersen (1838), where the title character

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from the volume *Rozrywki dla dzieci* ["Entertainment for Children"] (1858) by Klementyna Hoffmanowa.

is a toy with only one leg. It falls in love with a ballerina who also stands on one leg. The two excluded toys find each other, maybe thanks to their disability, which makes them special.

The idea of 'monstrous toys' also appears in Pixar's animation, *Toy Story* (dir. Lesseter, 1995), where the main protagonists, Woody and Buzz Astral, end up in their neighbour's house, where a bully, Sid, has destroyed a whole lot of toys. Woody and Buzz see that they have all been put together again but from different 'body parts,' and their looks are simply scary. As it later turns out, those toys which, unlike 'normal' toys, cannot speak, are simply miserable and all they want is to help Woody and Buzz in defeating their oppressor. Monstrous toys appear to be less monstrous than their creator, a violent child that needs to be disciplined.

Another Pixar production that exploits the topic of disability would be *Finding Nemo* (Stanton, 2003). In the animation, the main character, little Nemo, is the only survivor of a fish attack, during which all his siblings and his mother die. Nemo is born with one fin smaller than the other, due to which his swimming is slower. That however does not exclude him from social life in school. He is accepted by his classmates and the small fin appears to be just a curiosity for them. For many scholars Nemo is a figure of disability (Bérubé, 2005: 568; Garland-Thomson, 2005: 522; Preston, 2010) that is presented to the audience in a non-imposing way; the viewer is to classify the character as having a disability or not. However, ultimately, the only category Nemo needs to be placed in is that of a son of an overprotective, but loving, father and a peer to his classmates. His disability is just one of many assigned to other characters: an allergy to H2O, memory loss, having scars. Also, another character, Dory, the star of the sequel *Finding Dory* (Stanton, 2016), might be considered a fish with disability, as she suffers from amnesia. The production presents a disability as just one of many things that distinguishes a person or any other creature from others with their kinds of 'disabilities,' implying that everyone is dealing with their own 'monsters,' and having one fin smaller than the other does not make one a 'freak.'

Two other heroes with disabilities coming from the animated world are Hiccup and Toothless, a human boy and a dragon from *How to Train Your Dragon* (dir. Sanders, DeBlois, 2010). The boy, the son of a Viking chieftain, is considered to be too weak to fight the dragons, which is the village's great tradition and, in local opinion, a necessity. Deprived of the 'fighter' ability, Hiccup works at the blacksmith's to become an inventor. At some point in the story, and by accident, he captures a dragon and fixes his injured fin by replacing it with an artificial one. As the story goes, Hiccup and Toothless become friends, overturning the myth of hatred between humans and dragons. In the ultimate fight at the end of the movie, Hiccup loses his left leg and becomes a person with a disability just like Toothless,

which, however, does not make him any less of a human. After gaining a prosthetic he continues his mission to unite humans and dragons, regardless of any kind of disability.

Another place where children with disabilities are presented as wonders more than 'freaks' is *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* (Riggs, 2011) In the book, accompanied by the old photographs collected by Ransom Riggs presenting 'peculiar children,' the author develops a vision of a house in which children with exceptional abilities and appearance must hide from the threatening adult world. In this world, monsters are hunting for extraordinary children, who are themselves considered to be 'freaks' outside Miss Peregrine's house. In his book, Riggs consciously refers to the tradition of freak shows: children are in a way displayed by him, presented to the reader as peculiarities. What would be considered a disability by 'the real' world, in Miss Peregrine's house, the guardian of children, is the uniqueness of the youngsters and their great power.

A book that speaks directly about disability would be *Wonder* (Palacio, 2012). Its main character Auggie is a boy with a deformed face, which other people are even afraid to look at. His 'monstrous' appearance is repeatedly emphasised in the book, but what is most exposed is the perspective of a child aware of its 'monstrosity.' The story, with a strong didactic message, also shows how a person with a disability is perceived by other people: family members, but also peers or adults, such as teachers. The monstrosity of the boy is redefined and perceived as something extraordinary, exceptional and not necessarily scary. As the spin-off picture book title *We're All Wonders* (Palacio, 2017) suggests, we are all monsters.

For sure, there are many more examples of young people's popular culture that can be discussed within disability studies.[212] Such would be multiple depictions of sirens and mermaids being a metaphor for

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[212]   Such an example would be Barbie dolls. Barbie on a wheelchair and with prosthetic limbs was introduced in 2019. Michelle Lou and Brandon Griggs anticipate that: "Barbie's new looks could help fight the stigma around physical disabilities" (Lou, Griggs, 2019). The whole collection (the Barbie Fashionista line) is supposed to "offer kids more diverse representations of beauty." Interestingly, Mattel states that one of the designs was prepared in collaboration with 13-year-old Jordan Reeves, a "disability activist, who was born without a left forearm." Mattel even included a ramp for the wheelchair for a Barbie Dream House. As Lou and Griggs report, Curt Decker, executive producer of the National Disability Rights Network, "hopes the new dolls can remove stigmas surrounding disabilities and show kids that there is 'nothing wrong' with people who have them." Truly, the transformations of Barbie, the toy icon and the embodiment of female perfection, can change the view of humanity represented in mainstream discourse. Just like the previous solutions, presenting Barbie with a different body type, skin colour or functions reflects the contemporary tendency of changes in the toy and popular culture industry in general.

disabilities: in *Descendants* (2015) and *Siren* (2018) former mermaids are on wheelchairs. Some might consider Mr X Academy, from the X-men universe, to be, just like in Riggs's novels, a place for young people with special abilities, not necessarily with 'special needs.' Another example comes from the huge production of the *Game of Thrones* (Benioff, Weiss, 2011-2019) TV-series, based on books by George R.R. Martin, where child characters in general play the most important roles. Bran Stark, a boy in a wheelchair becomes a three-eyed raven, a being with endless knowledge, that stands for the memory of humanity. His sister, Arya Stark, while training becomes temporarily blind and a 'perfect killer.' Also thanks to that she kills the King of the White Walkers. Both of those characters save humanity from death, which must be considered the ultimate accomplishment.

At the beginning of the 21st century, as was presented above, children's and young adult culture was enriched with texts containing disability topics, which reflect the general tendency to develop inclusiveness into the main narrative. Such strategies show that monstrosity as it was known up to even the late 20th century, needs to be redefined, as its components, such as disabilities, requires a new methodological approach.

The Boy Who Killed a Minotaur

Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief (Riordan, 2005), as well as the following parts of the series,[213] might be perceived as a story about exclusion due to different forms of disabilities. The main protagonist is diagnosed with a spectrum of ADHD and dyslexia, his Latin teacher and mentor is in a wheelchair,[214] his best friend can not walk without crutches, and his half-brother Tyson (from *Sea of Monsters*, Riordan, 2006) has some kind of a mental disability. All those disabilities however turn out to be manifestations of mythological monstrosity: Percy, being a mythical hero, Chiron being a centaur, Grover a satire and Tyson a cyclops. If we

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[213]   *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* series: *The Lightning Thief* (2005), *The Sea of Monsters* (2006), *The Titan's Curse* (2007), *The Battle of the Labyrinth* (2008), *The Last Olympian* (2009). Riordan also released the following supplementary works related to the Percy Jackson series: *The Demigod Files* (2009), *The Ultimate Guide* (2010), *The Demigod Diaries* (2012), and the sequel series: *The Heroes of Olympus* (2010-2014). Riordan also wrote many crossover books and rewritings of other mythologies, i.e. the Egyptian series *The Kane Chronicles*.

[214]   "Mr Brunner was this middle-aged guy in a motorized wheelchair. He had thinning hair and a scruffy beard and a frayed tweed jacket, which always smelled like coffee. You wouldn't think he'd be cool, but he told stories and jokes and let us play games in class. He also had this awesome collection of Roman armour and weapons, so he was the only teacher whose class didn't put me to sleep" (Riordan, 2005: 2). Percy also mentions that Mr Brunner has "radar ears" (6) and "intense brown eyes that could've been a thousand years old and had seen everything" (7).

take into consideration that Riordan's son Haley has dyslexia and ADHD as well (the first book is dedicated to him) and the whole cycle ought to be an encouragement for him to come to like reading, there is no doubt that the author meant to re-create the mythological world as a modern inclusive universe where almost all the monsters find their place. The story is about the young boy, Percy, living the life of an archetypical outcast, who finds out his father is the god Poseidon. From then on, Percy is introduced to various concepts of the mythological world that have been transferred from ancient Greece to the United States of America.[215]

Not only all sorts of sickness become a sign of exclusion. At the very beginning, Riordan (2005) introduces the readers to the concept of exclusion. Percy, as the narrator of the story, warns us thus:

> Look, I didn't want to be a half-blood.
> If you're reading this because you think you might be one, my advice is: close this book right now. Believe whatever lie your mom or dad told you about your birth, and try to lead a normal life.
> Being a half-blood is dangerous. It's scary. Most of the time, it gets you killed in painful, nasty ways.
> If you're a normal kid, reading this because you think it's fiction, great. Read on. I envy you for being able to believe that none of this ever happened.
> But if you recognize yourself in these pages – if you feel something stirring inside – stop reading immediately. You might be one of us. And once you know that, it's only a matter of time before they sense it too, and they'll come for you.
> Don't say I didn't warn you. (1)

On the very first page, Percy Jackson suggests that the reality surrounding the readers might just be an illusion and the key to finding out whether it is true or not is by reading this book. What is more, he introduces the readers to the concept of half-blood, known from the Harry Potter series: being someone who does not fit into any community, any society because of one's 'non-pure' origins. Not only that, Percy describes the very clear polarisation of characters appearing in his story: good – 'us,' and evil – 'monsters.'

At the beginning of his story, Percy does not feel included in the school community: Mr Brunner aka Chiron calls him "not normal," afterwards the boy concludes he is "a nobody, from a family of nobodies" (Riordan, 2005: 22). But in a short while it becomes clear that being dyslectic and hyperactive is not a manifestation of a disability, but mythical powers, typical of every half-blood introduced in the series. Dyslexia is simply Greek letters, and ADHD is the manifestation of every hero's instincts.

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[215]   Olympus, for example, is on the 600th floor of the Empire State Building.

Still, Percy is monstrous, alienated, but not in the same way as the monsters he has to kill. The question appears – what does it mean to be a monster in Percy Jackson's world?

Monsters in Riordan's universe are inferior to heroes, half-blood teenagers, obliged to kill vicious creatures sent by Hades. In the real world, they can take any form: a teacher can be fury, Chihuahua can be a chimera, etc., and they do not have a soul. Due to this fact, they cannot die; as it is explained to Percy: "They don't have souls, like you and me. You can dispel them for a while, maybe even for a whole lifetime if you're lucky. But they are primal forces. Chiron calls them archetypes. Eventually, they re-form" (Riordan, 2005: 86). Monsters also have a specific smell. In *The Sea Monsters* we read:

> The monster's shadow passed in front of the shop. I could smell the thing – a sickening combination of wet sheep wool and rotten meat and that weird sour body odour only monsters have, like a skunk that's been living off Mexican food. (Riordan, 2006: 2)

It is not yet clear whether Chiron and Grover also qualify as monsters. As will be established in the following part of the analysis, Grover too does not have a soul and smells strange. Some mythical beasts can be teachers, like satyrs, nymphs, a centaur, others – Minotaur, Furies, hell-hounds – are machines designated to kill. Tyson, Percy's half-brother, is yet another case. First, we get to know his character, as usual, from Percy's perspective:

> Tyson was the only homeless kid at Meriwether College Prep. As near as my mom and I could figure, he'd been abandoned by his parents when he was very young, probably because he was so... different. He was six-foot-three and built like the Abominable Snowman, but he cried a lot and was scared of just about everything, including his own reflection. His face was kind of misshapen and brutal-looking. I couldn't tell you what color his eyes were, because I could never make myself look higher than his crooked teeth. His voice was deep, but he talked funny, like a much younger kid – I guess because he'd never gone to school before coming to Meriwether. He wore tattered jeans, grimy size-twenty sneakers, and a plaid flannel shirt with holes in it. He smelled like a New York City alleyway, because that's where he lived, in a cardboard refrigerator box off 72nd Street. (9)

It is hard to determine what kind of disability Tyson has, but his behaviour points to some kind of late development issue or maybe Down Syndrome. What is also crucial in this description is the association of disability with poverty, observed in 19th-century children's literature by Alicja Fidowicz. What is more, Tyson is called by one of his classmates 'freak,' which also places him within the disability discourse. In the

following parts, Tyson's real cyclops identity is revealed. Annabeth explains his situation to Percy:

> "They're [cyclops, homeless orphans] in almost all the big cities [...] They're... mistakes, Percy. Children of nature spirits and gods... Well, one god in particular, usually... and they don't always come out right. No one wants them. They get tossed aside. They grow up wild on the streets. I don't know how this one found you, but he obviously likes you [...]" (Riordan, 2016: 43)

What Annabeth describes, how those creatures are considered 'mistakes' left to die in the wild city, reminds us of the strategies adopted towards children with disability in antiquity, recalled by Nowińska and Nowiński. The fact that Tyson survived so long only proves his determination and will to live. As we find out later in the story, his role can be as important as any other, for cyclops too can be true heroes.

What becomes even more problematic is what Percy says to Grover in the moment of danger: "Even if you are half barnyard animal, you're my best friend and I don't want you to die!" (Riordan, 2005: 48). It might be perceived as a manifestation of superiority, especially when he later mentions his "dreams full of barnyard animals," who wanted to either kill him or were looking for food (Riordan, 2005: 57), which alludes to both Minotaur and Grover. They are both perceived by Percy as being less human than he is.

As Grover Underwood is one of the main characters in the story, how he has been created in books, but also in movie adaptations (see Chapter V), appears to be the most troubling, considering the trends in the field of disability studies. Therefore, the following part will consist of a close analysis of the said satyr to demonstrate the mechanisms of monstrosity and disability.

Satyrs, Fauns, Etc.: From Myths to Children's Culture[216]

In Greek mythology, satyrs,[217] inseparable companions of Dionysus (or, in some accounts, of Pan, the god of nature), originally were depicted as hybrids of a human and a goat (Grimal, 1997: 318). Most often they would have had a torso and the face of a human, but their lower body, tail and ears were said to be of a goat (318). Later on, after the Hellenic period, satyrs were equated with Silenus – a creature with a human upper body and the lower one of a horse, similar to satyrs, only older and wiser (Stierstorfer, 2016: 290–296); satyrs and Silenus were not distinguished

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[216]   This part of the book is based on my article: *Disability, Race, and the Black Satyr of the United State of America* (Mik, 2019a).
[217]   In Roman mythology also fauns.

anymore and became one type of creature with the traits of both beasts (318). Acording to Grimal, satyrs rarely played any particular role in mythology (318), as even Hesiod in his work calls them "worthless" and "helpless" (March, 2014: 435). However, we encounter several important satyrs, e.g. Marsyas. Later on, because of the Romans, satyrs were equated with Pan himself (Roman, Roman, 2010: 384). All those creatures ended up being a unified symbol of nature and playfulness, guardians of forests and players of pipes.

Nevertheless, the main physical trait of satyrs was not goat legs, but enormously large penises (often presented on statues from that time) that symbolised their insatiable lust and animal-driven desire for sex (with people and non-human animals). As Pierre Grimal (1997) writes, satyrs were also imagined as chasing after Maenads and nymphs, who – with their consent or not – were the objects/victims of the beasts' desires (318). Mainly for that reason these goat-like creatures were often exploited by later artists who used them in their works as a symbol of uncontrollable sexual power and fertility. However, as Grimal claims, "with time images of satyrs lost their primal animal character" (318). After a while, satyrs' penises became smaller (they were presented as having the 'normal,' human size), and even disappeared completely or were hidden by the authors of various works (e.g. on such paintings as *Two Satyrs* by Paul Rubens, 1618/1619; or *Nymphs and Satyr* by William-Adolphe Bouguereau, 1873). With time, some artists also started to highlight their idyllic nature, connection to nature, passion for dancing and playing music, maybe alluding to the figure of Phaunos [Faunus], a Roman counterpart of Pan, who was also considered to be a kind and wise creature that often guided humans in their adventures. The depictions of satyrs changed throughout the ages, and if Grimal (1997: 318) claims that they have lost their animal character, it is worth acknowledging what they gained instead and looking into whether their more recent representations point to other characteristics that they initially lacked in classical mythology.

We can encounter a fair amount of human–goat hybrids in Western culture of the 20th and 21st centuries: in books such as *Baudolino* by Umberto Eco (2000/2003) or *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* by J. M. Barrie (1906); in movies like *Pan's Labyrinth* (del Toro, Navarro, Cuarón, Torresblanco, & Augustin, 2006), and also in TV-series, e.g. *The Magicians* (Gamble et al., 2015–2018). They appear in children's literature too. Apart from the early 20th-century examples, like *The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame (orig. 1908, 2017), we can mention a faun named Tumnus, the first creature that Lucy met in Narnia, who became her friend and guardian (Lewis, orig. 1950, 2000), or satyrs featured in *Fableheaven* by Brandon Mull (2006), presented as playful, carefree and slightly lazy creatures living in an enchanted sanctuary.

Like many mythological beasts, fauns and their 'relatives' often function as exotic, often liminal creatures that represent the hidden wild emotions of a growing child. They rarely play the main role in the story; satyrs, etc. are either sidekicks accompanying the main character or representatives of the fantastic and unknown. Mr. Tumnus might be one of the rare examples of fauns having a name and being distinct characters, acknowledged in the story. If not inferior to the protagonist, they are often separated from his or her world, as satyrs and fauns are part of the sacred world that is not compatible with the profane universe of heroes and heroines of children's culture. Grover Underwood, created by Rick Riordan, is yet another example of adapting a mythological creature to a character within contemporary children and young adult literature. He is a modernized version of the concept known from classical mythology and its later cultural transformations. Depictions of Grover – in the book and the film – will be analysed here in chronological order.

In his work, Riordan focuses on adapting classical mythology to the contemporary context and retells well-known ancient stories so they are suitable for young readers. Here, although the word 'adapting' might not fully allude to the methodological approach to literature and movies, retelling the myths is some sort of adjustment too.[218] However, although it has been attempted with folk tales, fairy tales, and legends (Woźniak, 2012: 26), it is hard to analyse the adaptation of a myth (Hutcheon, 2013: 8) as we, again, do not have the 'original' version. Myths – as having been retold through the ages – are constantly transforming beings; they resemble living creatures that have evolved, adjusted and survived to this day, like fairy tales.[219] Contemporary authors also add new meanings and recreate old plots which strongly connect their works to the phenomenon of adaptation, making them *aoidos* of our times and contributors to the bibliographical base for researchers of classical reception.[220]

The Lightning Thief is the first part of Rick Riordan's pentalogy that is one of the most popular examples of telling a children's story derived from classical mythology (Paul, 2017: 231). As mentioned in the introduction, it tells a story of a young boy, Percy Jackson, struggling with school and adapting to society. From the beginning of the book, a satyr, Grover Underwood, is Percy's protector and best friend. Before the mythological

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[218] 'Adaptation' derives from the Latin 'adaptare' which means: to adjust, to provide adequacy, to correspond, etc.

[219] However, there exist some very prominent standard versions of myths, to which contemporary authors often refer to. One example is Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, presented as a primary source in many international media for children and young adults (Stierstorfer 2016: 43).

[220] According to Lorna Hardwick (2003), reception studies cover research tracing the motifs of classical antiquity in the culture of later times and examining their meanings on various levels. Reception studies also include researching children's culture (Marciniak, 2016).

world is revealed to Percy (it is sealed under magical mist), Grover, as a satyr, has to wear a disguise too. He is presented as a teenager with some sort of leg dysfunction and his hooves are hidden in ordinary shoes.

The 'race' of the upper part of the satyr's body is also specified. Percy's first recognition of Grover's origins reveals possible connections to his black roots, yet it is not explicitly defined, as he only mentions Grover's curly brown hair (Riordan, 2005/2008: 3). Certainly it cannot be assumed that every person with curly black hair is black, especially if in the graphic novel *The Lightning Thief* (Riordan, Venditti, Futaki, Vilarrubia, 2010) Grover has brown eyes and Caucasian skin.

Grover's first description given by Percy (he is the narrator in the book) does not present him as a very dangerous creature:

> Grover was an easy target. He was scrawny. He cried when he got frustrated. He must've been held back several grades, because he was the only sixth grader with acne and the start of a wispy beard on his chin. On the top of all that, he was crippled. [...] He walked funny, like every step hurt him, but don't let that fool you. You should've seen him run when it was enchilada day in cafeteria. (Riordan, 2008: 3)

It might be assumed then that Grover is several years older than Percy (in the first book the protagonist is 12 years old). Even so, he is posed as not one of the 'popular kids' from the school. He is probably excluded because of his problems with graduating, vulnerability and – maybe most of all – disability. However, the lack of popularity does not seem be an issue for Grover. His main task is to protect Percy from any danger: whether it is getting into trouble at school or being almost killed by a mythical monster.

As we find out later, Grover only pretends have disability just to hide his goat legs, thus – he has a 'funny' walk. He reveals his true appearance when Percy and he are in danger (Percy is accused by the gods of stealing Zeus's bolt and is frequently attacked by mythological monsters). When the appropriate moment comes, Grover does not need to hide his animal part anymore. Percy describes his friend as follows:

> Grover ran for the Camaro – but he wasn't running, exactly. He was trotting, shaking his shaggy hindquarters, and suddenly his story about a muscular disorder in his legs made sense to me. I understood how he could run so fast and still limp when he walked.
>
> Because where his feet should be, there were no feet. There were cloven hooves. (Riordan, 2008: 43)

After encountering the mythological monster Minotaur, who also abducts Percy's mother into the Underworld, Percy and Grover join the

community of Camp Half-Blood, a special facility for mythological heroes and beasts. Here, Percy learns, inter alia, about Grover's goat traits: he eats soda cans, he bleeps like a goat. He is also able to read Percy's emotions, which is one of the satyr's abilities. In Riordan's world these also would be: pride, stubbornness, fancying ladies (predominantly nymphs and dryads), gambling, but also the ability to control animals by playing the pipes, communicating with them, and protecting them by placing the satyr's sanctuary (blessing) on them. This was a sort of protection spell, which also gave them the ability to find food and shelter (Riordan, 2008: 257). Satyrs do not have a soul like humans and after they die, they can be reincarnated into a flower or another element of nature (316).

 Just like previously in his 'human' school, Grover is not appreciated in mythological society. Chiron, a wise centaur and the leader in the facility, says: "[...] Grover is a late bloomer, even by satyr standards, and not yet very accomplished at woodland magic. Alas, he was anxious to pursue his dream. Perhaps now he will find some other career..." (78). Even though Grover resides among mythological creatures, he still has to earn his place in the society of heroes. In order to do that he has to fulfil his destiny as a satyr and find the long lost god of satyrs, Pan, which is his life's dream.

Throughout the story Grover is most often presented as a 'hybrid,' not only of a human and a goat, but also of a human teenager and a mythological satyr. When he, Percy and Annabeth (daughter of Athena, the third protagonist) go for a quest, Grover is described as follows:

> Grover wore his fake feet and his pants to pass as human. He wore a green rasta-style cap, because when it rained his curly hair flattened and you could just see the tips of his horns. His bright orange backpack was full of scrap metal and apples to snack on. In his pocket was a set of reed pipes his daddy goat had carved for him, even though he only knew two songs: Mozart's Piano Concerto no. 12 and Hillary Duff's "So Yesterday," both of which sounded pretty bad on reed pipes. (150)

Even in his music interests a certain identity tension might be detected and it might reflect Grover's double (because of his 'double hybridity' – quadruple?) nature. Not that it is impossible for one to like both – Mozart and Hillary Duff – but apparently, when one is a satyr and also a teenager, it is much easier for 'double nature' to function.

Previously excluded from the middle-school society because of his disability, Grover, as a satyr, is also not especially popular in Camp Half-Blood, but for different reasons. In the mythical environment he does not have disability. Percy, however, is still confused and perceives Grover as Proteus: after losing his camouflage, the faun does not become 'normal' in his friend's eyes but gains other forms of exclusiveness, i.e. his goat legs. Grover becomes a mythological monster and his goat legs

now represent a new form of disability. Even though with the animal part of his body come animal and mythological skills, mentioned before, for Percy he is still a different creature, not equal to semi-gods. Percy even notes that Grover smelled of "a wet barnyard animal" (4), automatically putting him in the discourse of animal-like dependency. Those two forms of exclusion – disability and animality – correspond to each other and present a symbolic tension between the mythological and disability. Fantastic beasts become a metaphor for disability.

His exclusion, symbolised by his mythological status, is mainly focused on his disability, which in fact is his source of power and which has to be hidden from the world. In the book, it was a disability, not race, that marked Grover as an excluded monster. This changes in the movie adaptation directed by Chris Columbus, which is described in the following chapter.

Riordan's work, even if not considered to be a literary masterpiece, is truly one of the few to present disability in such a wide perspective. Such depictions might help young readers to mirror their world in the mythical narrative. This applies not only to those who has disability, but who are also 'normal,' so they can see for themselves that a freak show does not serve as entertainment but shows the world as it is, full of monsters with disabilities.

CHAPTER V:
'MONSTERS OF COLOUR'

Figure 5. A centaur — a monster burdened with a "savage"reputation

KING MIDAS DOES NOT HUNT once he git it into his head to lay his hands on a Silenus Three days he chased him till at last he caught him hit him with his fist between the eyes and asked: – what is best for man?
The Silenus neighed and said: – to be nothing – to die
Zbigniew Herbert, *Parable of King Midas*, trans. Valles, orig. 1956, 2007.

Animality, gender, disability, and sickness analysed in the previous chapters are not the only constructs that represent excluded monsters. For centuries, and for various reasons, people of colour were perceived[221] as non-normal, as the Others, and as monsters, potentially threatening communities of predominantly white men (Allen, 2014: 33). The teratological framework directly applies to the discourse of race, as both the perpetrator and the victim can be perceived, depending on the standpoint, as a monster.[222]

Albert James Arnold (1996) notes:

> [...] monsters were present in the minds of the earliest explorers and colonisers of the New World well before the institution of African chattel slavery was devised. Monsters lurked in the seas at the edges (liminal sites) of the known world as cartographers conceived them. Moreover, these monsters were logical projections of Otherness, within the discourse of European superiority. When actual monsters were not encountered by the explorers, monstrous traits were attributed to whatever natives were at hand in order to justify branding them enemies of God. (10)

This cultural construct based on race and false assumptions towards different ethnicities is complicated and varies depending on national, social and historical contexts. In this chapter, I do not attempt to summarise the discussions around the history of racism (Bullard, 1998; Fredrickson, 2000; Richards, 2003) nor the critical race theory (Hartlep, 2011; Delgado, Stefancic, 2012; Dixson, Rousseau Anderson, Donnor, 2017)[223] but rather highlight the intersectional parts of 'monsters of colour,' a term that will

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[221] In some parts of the world they still are.
[222] As Clarence M. Allen calls the former 'the monster of racism' (35).
[223] Critical race theory dates back to the 1960s and the intellectual environment of activists in the United States. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2012) define it as follows: "The critical race theory (CRT) movement is a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power. The movement considers many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses take up, but places them in a broader perspective that includes economics, history, context, group- and self-interest, and even feelings and the unconscious. Unlike traditional civil rights, which stresses incrementalism and step-by-step progress, critical race theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law" (3).

accompany the analysis in this chapter, and show how this concept, or concepts, interplay with general notions on race and monstrosity.

In antiquity, something that was distanced geographically[224] was also distanced in the meaning of identity (Wieczorkiewicz, 2009: 23–24). As Wieczorkiewicz writes: "The spatial extent of the world was associated with the uniqueness of the forms that may appear in it" (24), although not necessarily in a positive manner. In Greek mythology, we rarely encounter characters of colour,[225] one of the few being Hephaestus, the 'intersectional god,' already described in the previous chapter. In the times of slavery, some also in antiquity, people of colour were often treated as objects, although their status was not unified.[226] For a very long time, in many countries, racism was not acknowledged as a demeaning notion. Not being white, especially in Europe, stood for not being a human. Later, especially in the 19th century, during the era of colonialism, for many Europeans non-white people were associated with wildness and animality (190), which proves its intersectional potential in the teratological discussion. Non-Europeans were 'collected' and put on display (192), just like other exotic collection items, captured by white conquerors of the Western world.

Cultural distance and the tradition of 'collecting' human showpieces served white people as 'a safe tool' to get to know 'monsters of colour' but not to interact with them directly. It also settled a distinctive system of who was observing whom, what roles they observed and played, and who had the real power. This observation was strictly connected to the study of 'monsters' from another world, very closely associated with 'original' teratology. As Wieczorkiewicz acknowledges:

> The mastery of the world was accompanied by measurement, description, classification, and the presentation of the effects of these actions was an important element of civilizational self-assertion. [...] The world appeared [...] as an object that could be seen, remembered, represented and reproduced. (192–193)

Just like in bestiaries, teratological handbooks, the one who collected and described the object of the research gained, in a way, power over them (see Chapter I). The same process of describing the monster, the Other, or any excluded individual, maybe applies especially to those texts presenting people of colour. Literature, movies, and television shows are very often linked to the establishment of power. They frequently present the images of minority groups regarding people's knowledge, approach, intentions, and sensitivity. The last factor appears to be the most

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[224] Tribes in Africa or Asia.
[225] Sometimes Memnon, the Ethiopian king, was presented on vases.
[226] E.g. in the Roman Empire, during the first centuries A.D., they had the opportunity to gain freedom (Nathan, 2000: 174, etc.). Cf. Isaac, 2004; Isaac, 2006.

problematic for many creators, as it is to be observed in the following examples.

It might seem that the times of racism should be behind us. At the turn of the 21st century, Hollywood, for example, with its sins of the past, is trying to avoid its former mistakes and is bringing in more people of colour to represent minorities of the American society. However, it does not seem to be entirely successful. In 2016 the Academy Oscar nominees were only white actors and actresses, which started the hashtag #OscarsSoWhite, questioning the fact that racism is over (Yuen, 2017). This issue applies to a popular culture dedicated to young audiences as well, and not only in the USA, but in all environments immersed in popular culture. In the analyses following selected examples, I will attempt to decode cultural texts that include minorities within their narratives and examine what 'monsters of colour' represent.

One of the first major studies raising this issue would be *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games*, by Ebony Elizabeth Thomas (2019). In the introduction, the author expresses her concerns: "When people of color seek passageways into the fantastic, we have often discovered that the doors are barred. Even the very act of dreaming of worlds-that-never-were can be challenging when the known world does not provide many liberating spaces." (2) The example of Oscar's hashtag justifies such a claim, as people of colour are still underrepresented in the mainstream media. It seems even more troubling if we consider the fact that when people of colour eventually appear on big screens, they are often depicted as 'monsters.' Those characters rarely play important roles, so maybe their depictions should be taken even more into account while analysing the construct of 'the monster of colour,' which Thomas relates to as "Dark Other."

Thomas uses the term 'dark' in a very specific way. She writes:

> The traditional purpose of darkness in the fantastic is to disturb, to unsettle, to cause unrest. This primal fear of darkness and Dark Others is so deeply rooted in the Western myth that it is nearly impossible to find its origin. [...] In the West, the mysterious unknowability of darkness in nature was extended to a corresponding fear of unknown and unknowable dark things, including imaginary monsters beyond the boundaries of the known world during medieval times and, in the modern period, conquered and enslaved people from its margins. "Darky," a colloquial term for people of African descent during the late eighteenth century, signals that in modern English, darkness has never been just a metaphor. Darkness is personified, embodied, and most assuredly racialized. (19–20)

In this context, **dark is monstrous**. Such a correlation strengthens the connection between monstrosity and race: their meanings and cultural references overlap and correlate with each other. Thomas acknowledges

it as well, as she refers to Cohen's monster theory, proving its strict connection to the concept of race (20–22). Ultimately, she concludes that: "[...] when we read literary and cultural texts from the perspective of the monster, *not* the protagonist, we find ourselves in a completely different ballgame" (22) and that: "We never notice that monsters, fantastic beasts, and various Dark Others are silenced because we have never been taught the language that they speak" (23). This applies to all creatures, not only those excluded due to their skin colour (see Chapter I). However, while defining the Dark Other, she does not explain what the Other is in the first place and does not use teratology in a clear way.[227] Her thesis gets even more complicated when she includes fairy-tale tradition in the discussion and the theory of the Dark Other becomes vaguer. Hence, due to this confusion, I prefer to use the term: '**monsters of colour**,' implying not only the connection to teratology, but also including all minorities that might be excluded due to their origins or ethnicity.

The first examples analysed in this chapter come from Walt Disney's *Fantasia* (1940). Here, I would like to focus only on one motif: '**monstresses of colour**,' intersectional creatures, excluded due to their skin-colour and gender. In this animation, the diverse intersection includes many examples of black women portrayed in popular culture as lesser beings than those who are white, and, going further, of lower value than white men. Being a part of the disgraceful history of animation and one of the most vivid exemplifications of racism in early Hollywood, it opens the discussion on racism, the consequences of which the world of the 21st century is now facing.

Racist Disney and His Sunflower[228]

Walt Disney's *Fantasia* (1940) is famously known for having a piece of it cut out from the movie, and for a very good reason. *The Pastoral Symphony* is not the same version as it was in 1940 as it lacks the depiction of black centaurettes[229] that appeared among other mythological characters. 'The racial cut' can still be found on the Internet, among other disturbing images representing race in a cartoony, offensive way. The popular notion of Disney's products being sweet and innocent certainly changes while watching his documented sins which were monstrously racist throughout his whole Hollywood career.

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[227] In my opinion, the Other and monsters differ as constructs, which brings the necessity of clarification.
[228] This part of the analysis is based on my article: "Et in (Disney) Arcadia Ego: *In Search of Hope in the 1940* Fantasia" *(*Mik, 2021b).
[229] The name 'centaurettes' alludes to the tradition of burlesque (Allen, 1997: 255). However, 'centaurettes' stay in strong relation to 'centaurides,' described by classic writers.

The story is settled around the events at the foot of Mount Olympus, where centaurettes and centaurs meet. Although their skin has different colours, their brightness and facial features suggest that all those creatures are of white origin. The centaur pairs are matched by colour and as such are presented as ideal couples. After all, centaurettes met their destiny and ended up together with their loves, so the real celebration can finally begin. It is hard to claim whether the feast has been set to celebrate their happy endings or the other way around, for the Olympian gods to celebrate themselves. Centaurs gathered the grapes and prepared the wine for Bacchus, who entered drunk on a donkey with a horn (imitating a unicorn), accompanied by two centaurettes: black-skinned with a zebra corpus. The 'zebra' part of the centaurettes' bodies underlines the racial differences, as the others had plain, horse-like bodies.[230] Black centuaurettes pour out wine for him and fan the god, as supposedly the slaves did. Everyone dances and has fun, but the black centaurettes do not join the party. In this scene the characters represent the hierarchal order of the black woman serving the obese white man, "a lovable clown prone to excess" (Clague, 2004: 103).

One of the cartoon's traits, typical of that time, is that characters and events are presented in a comic, stereotypical way (Lexico, 2019). However, there is a certain kind of ethical responsibility for what topics and figures can be exploited, particularly if we consider animation to be a form of parody. As I believe, depicting Bacchus as a fat white man is not offensive to white men in the same way as presenting the black centaurettes as slaves: white men have always been privileged and still are at the peak of the social hierarchy. Choosing to present black women as servants of a god who represents white man's social status is unethical, considering the history of the slavery of black people, brutally exploited by colonial powers. In the 1940s, depictions of blacks serving white people were not perceived as offensive (that did not change until a couple decades later). Comedy as a convention in the two cases – depictions of a white man and black women – should not be treated as symmetrical, considering the political, social, and cultural backgrounds of those ethnic groups.

There is one more character to be mentioned regarding racist depictions in *Fantasia*. Due to the criticism received by Disney's studio in later years (Furniss, 2014: 120), the company had to eventually cut offensive scenes from the *Pastoral Symphony* episode in 1969. The main character in the cut-out piece was Sunflower. Her name not only underlines the species

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[230]   Such a motif also appears in the series *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* (Faust, 2010, S01E09), where 'regular' ponies meet Zecora, a zebra, which contrasts with other characters not only because of her looks, but customs (she is some sort of a witch that lives in the woods and practices magic). Not only does her name relate to one of the actual African tribes, also her looks (big earrings in her ears, thick jewellery on her neck) alludes to the traditional, or rather stereotypical appearance of an African woman.

difference between her and the rest of the centaurettes, wearing roses and daisies, etc. It also implies (as Kheri R. Willetts points out) a hierarchical difference, as sunflowers were once also referred to as "Ni***r-heads" (Willetts, 2013: 17; Murguía, 2018: 181), an offensive and debasing name for any object having a "black face" (Cassidy, 1996: 794-796). Black-skinned, with a stereotypically drawn face and rings in her ears (and with the lower part of her body resembling a "black donkey"; Willetts, 2013: 17), Sunflower (according to Willets, sometimes referred to as the "picaninny" centaurette) appears in this segment as the "white" centaurettes' slave or servant. While the beautiful and graceful ladies are flirting with the arriving centaurs, Sunflower puts flowers in their tails and carries the floral veil after clueless or maybe cruel "brides" who do not seem to notice her. Later, Otika (a twin black centaurette) rolls out a red carpet before Bacchus when he arrives. In the next part, a centaurette – along with the donkey Jacchus, connected to her by its Latin taxonomic name, Equus africanus asinus (Willetts, 2013: 17) – helps drunk Bacchus get to his throne. According to Mark Clague (2004), an American musicologist:

> The key to the humor of this sequence is the interaction between Bacchus and his donkey-unicorn or "mulicorn" sidekick, Jacchus. The name Jacchus, an echo of the words Bacchus and "jackass," refers both to the literal character – that is, a male donkey – as well as its comical behaviors. The small stature and exaggerated features [...] of Jacchus mark him as another minstrel character derived from nineteenth-century conventions of the buffoon Jim Crow. (103)

The black centaurettes and Jacchus serve as symbolic figures representing the power system in both the mythological and US world. The white manis at the centre, the domain of the highest authority. The black woman (as we can read Sunflower/Otika) preparing his place on the throne is a servant that tries to show him the 'right' way of getting to his 'management' spot. The horned donkey that seems not to care about an animal slave's role pushes Bacchus in a patriarchal tandem with Sunflower. This layout reflects the way of perceiving women (in this case, especially Afro-American women) and animals (culturally assigned as a working animal – donkey) by the contemporary American society and the creators of *Fantasia*. As far as racist depiction goes, this animation was of course not an exception – to mention only *Dumbo* (dir. Ben Sharpsteen, 1941) and *Song of the South* (dir. Harve Foster and Wilfred Jackson, 1946),[231] and these are just Disney examples. It was the era of 'black-face'

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[231]   In *Dumbo* we encounter several controversial scenes, among others the "Song of the Roustabouts," sung by faceless black workers (it includes the line "Grab that rope, you hairy ape"). The film also features black crows (including Jim Crow), animal characters representing black people. *Song of the South*, which portraits the life of Afro-Americans

cinematography; white actors painting their faces black and making fun of Afro-Americans was very popular (*Swing Time*, dir. George Stevens, 1936; *Everybody Sing*, dir. Edwin L. Marin, 1938). Racist animation was not perceived as such at that time and was very common.[232] Richard M. Breaux (2010), a specialist in ethnic and racial studies, claims:

> Critics of Disney films have pointed to the company's and the animation industries' long history of presenting non-whites as racial stereotypes and women of all colors as helpless, sexual objects. The disfiguring images of African, Latino, Asian, and Native Americans (ALANAs) are harmful in that they influence how both people who are racial insiders and outsiders perceive, relate to, and come to understand themselves, these groups, and individuals who personally identify as such. (399)

It would seem that this was no longer an issue in the 1990s, but the problem of racism in Disney movies persisted long after the production of *Fantasia*. As Breaux points out, Jasmine (from *Aladdin*, dir. Ron Clements and John Musker, 1992), even if registered as the first non-white Disney princess, "was voiced by a non-middle-eastern actress, Linda Larkin" (400). Although Disney attempted to redeem itself by introducing the first 'black princess' in *The Princess and the Frog* (dir. John Musker and Ron Clements, 2009), it still has a long way to 'make up' for the years of excluding proper portrayals of minorities from its productions.[233]

The next examples of racist depictions of mythical monsters come from different times and media. They concern, however, the same creatures: centaurs, this time of the male gender. The first one comes from a writer that would probably not be seen as being racist. Nonetheless, there are many types of stereotypical approaches to diversity and ethnicity. One of them can be found among the pop-cultural texts, a monster that emerges unwanted, uninvited, and yet having a strong position in the discussion about race.

Rowling's Dark Fantastic Sins[234]

Even though, as the previous paragraphs show, the situation of ethnic minorities is far from ideal, the beginning of the 21st century certainly has brought some positive changes. For example, *Harry Potter and the Cursed*

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during the post-slavery period (after the Civil War), gave rise to multiple controversies due to its racist depictions of black people.

[232]   Examples include (to name a few): *Making Stars* (dir. Dave Fleisher, USA: Fleisher Studios, 1935); *Scrub Me Mama with a Boogie Beat* (dir. Walter Lantz, USA: Walter Lantz Productions, 1941); *Southern Fried Rabbit* (dir. I. Freleng, USA: Warner Bros. Pictures, 1953).

[233]   Although there have been rather successful attempts of this sort, like the remake of *The Lion King* from 2019, directed by Jon Favreu.

[234]   Selected parts of the analysis are based on my article, also used in the previous chapter: "Disability, Race, and the Black Satyr of the United States of America: The Case

Child (Rowling, Thorne, & Tiffany, 2016), the play that is a continuation of the story known from the books and movies[235], raised the hopes of millions of fans wanting to enter the world of Harry Potter once again. In 2015, the play's cast was announced and the surprise was quite immense. Among the actors most easily associated with the 'original' characters,[236] one raised a certain amount of controversy, especially among the fans of the book series. This concerned Noma Dumezweni, a black actress playing Hermione, who appeared to be an unacceptable choice for some representatives of the general public (Ratcliffe, 2016).

J. K. Rowling (2015) soon twitted: "Canon: brown eyes, frizzy hair and very clever. White skin was never specified. Rowling loves black Hermione." And even though some fans still posted on Twitter paragraphs from the books suggesting that Hermione might be a white-skinned girl (dylinskii, 2015), most recipients accepted an actress of colour for this role, finding it a reasonable choice because of Hermione's muggle upbringing and her relatively bad treatment at school, where she was called a 'mudblood' by some (Ratcliffe, 2016).

This is not the first time the issue of the race appeared in criticism of Rowling's work.[237] Another one comes from Racher Rostad's (2013) slam-poetry: *To JK Rowling from Cho Chang*, where the author criticizes the depiction of the character of Asian origin (Lee: 2013). Some scholars however perceive Rowling's literary strategy concerning race discussion differently. Alyssa Hunziker (2013) states that: "Rowling uses the issue of blood status and species difference as a means through which she can comfortably discuss race relations, as many of the racial issues present in their novels are removed from the real-world contemporary conflict." (54) Another researcher, Jen Harrison (2018), recalls that: "A number of critics have pointed out the central concern within the series with 'purity' particularly as it relates to the interrelated questions of race and species" (327). Although such issues will be discussed in the subchapter on the House-Elves, there is doubt whether the visible absence of other-than-white characters in the series (or their minor presence) is an acceptable literary strategy and if the discussion on race is really 'comfortable,' regarding both the authors and the recipients. Hunziker (2013) also acknowledges, as she continuous:

> In establishing this internal racial dichotomy [blood-status – AM], Rowling rarely mentions the marginal characters descended from colonial

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of Grover Underwood from Rick Riordan's *The Lighting Thief* and Its Film Adaptation by Chris Columbus," (Mik, 2019a).

[235]   The play tells the story of Harry Potter's son Albus Severus trying to face his own destiny and also standing face to face with his father's burden (Rowling, Thorne, 2016).

[236]   Jamie Parker, playing Harry – with glasses, and Paul Thornley, playing Ron – with red hair.

[237]   A few of them will be discussed in the following parts of the book.

backgrounds [Lee Jordan, Dean Thomas, Padma and Parvati Patil – AM], but instead mentions those of supposed 'lesser' blood status, who often belong to white hegemonic society. (57)

Putting aside other issues concerning the *Cursed Child* (Is it a part of the *Potter* canon? What is its value in comparison to other *Potter*-related works?), this example shows the ideological aspects of the adaptation process and the result of a decision the creator of a certain text can make that is able not only to change the perspective from which their work is considered, but also upset the members of the audience that already know and love the original and, in a way, 'imprinted' depictions of their favourite characters.[238] These visual representations are often very important for the audience even if they prefer books to films – as in the statements suggesting that Emma Watson, a **white** actress, will always be Hermione and that this character shall not be black (Ratcliffe, 2016). This, probably, was one of the reasons for the fandom's standing against casting a black actress in this particular role.

There is a certain risk in adapting, in most cases literary texts into movies, especially if we acknowledge the verbal-oriented approach to adaptation, according to which a text is perceived as the 'original,' or as a 'better' variant or a particular story than its film version (Choczaj, 2011: 14).[239] But, as Dorota Michułka and Ryszard Waksmund (2012) highlight: "[...] the new text [...] is not a replica of the original but a unique artistic work with its fresh **ideological structure**" (16; emphasis added). Małgorzata Choczaj (2011) also underlines that: "[...] a certain creator, in the moment of getting to know primer material, chooses forms, adjusting the content to his or her needs" (15). Therefore, each time, it is a different text, with its own, often new creators, new ideological context and, frequently, new elements simply adjusted to the new medium that we are dealing with. Such a case would certainly be skin colour that has not been exactly specified (in the book) and the necessity of visually specifying it (in the play). The 'black Hermione' would be, at least at first glance, an example of the mentioned phenomenon: the skin colour of this character was never specified in Rowling's books and it never appeared as an issue. And on no account should it be one in an ideally and healthily functioning society The fact that it was, in the case of the play, certainly reflects the struggle of predominantly white people over racial minorities.

There are not many representations of people of colour in fantasy speculative fiction for young readers (Thomas, 2018: 4–5). Sometimes it is because very often the colour of the literary characters' skin is not

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[238]   Especially those in the visual arts.
[239]   For more about movie adaptations of ancient mythology and history, see, for example, Janka, & Stierstorfer, 2017a: 24; Marciniak, 2018.

specified,[240] but in most cases, it is a fact that ethnic minorities are not included in the mainstream narrative. It seems even more disturbing when not only people of colour do not appear in 'the big series' but they are also depicted as excluded monsters. Although they rarely play important roles, their depiction must be taken into consideration in the discussion of how minorities are presented to the broad audience. I would like to deprive the following texts of the white privilege of storytelling and imagine how those characters would be read through a slightly different perspective.

Centaurs – "Ruddy Star-gazers"[241]

In Greek mythology, centaurs were depicted as wild and brutal creatures: half-men, half-horses. They ate raw meat and their customs were unusually wild: they were famous for raping and drinking, almost every single one of them was identified as a savage creature that was a danger to humans on their travels. However, two of them, Chiron and Pholus, were born as demi-gods and their personalities were different: they had a quiet disposition and were friendly towards humans.[242]

There are numerous examples of centaurs that appear in children's and young adult culture. However, most of them, inspired by Chiron,[243] are not wild and brutal rapists and drinkers – for rather obvious reasons. Juliette Harrison calls C.S. Lewis's centaurs from Narnia "an entire race of Chirons" (2010), proving how antiquity inspired this particular, and apparently, many more, creators in a rather indirect way. Even tamed, centaurs are not always assimilated with the society of the presented world, which often emerges in the works for children. In her bestiary for children, *Atlante dei mostri e dei fantasmi più spaventosi* ["Atlas of Monsters and Ghosts"], Federica Magrin (2018) warns the readers that maybe because of their uncertain nature it would be good to stay away from the centaurs (20). On the other hand (and concerning a different culture as well), in his poem "Centaur" from the collection *Księga potworów* ["The Book of Monsters"], Michał Rusinek (2016) points to his dual nature: sometimes he speaks like a horse, sometimes like a true gentleman; he eats hay but also he drinks French champagne. Rusinek ends his text with the question: "Who are you, Centaur?" (16), as the creature is maybe the most mysterious creature of Greek mythology.

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[240]   Vide Hermione Granger.
[241]   This part is based on one of my articles: Mik, 2017.
[242]   Centaurs are mentioned in (among others): Pindar, *Pythian Ode* 2. 33 (trans. Conway) (Greek lyric c. 5th B.C.); Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* E1. 20 (trans. Aldrich) (Greek mythographer c. 2nd A.D.).
[243]   For example in series: *Percy Jackson*, *Class of Titans*, *Beasts of Olympus*.

The same question appears to be important to Rowling, as she has chosen those creatures to play important roles in her saga. It seems that the author based her main centaur characters on Chiron and Pholus. In the first book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997), as punishment, Hagrid takes students to the Forbidden Forest to track blood traces of a dying unicorn. There they meet a centaur called Ronan, a friend of Hagrid, who is kind towards everybody and from the very beginning not aggressive at all. His knowledge about the world seems to be much deeper than that of wizards themselves. He says: "Mars is bright tonight [...] Unusually bright," (185) as if he gets to know Harry and his friends' future.[244] Also, the way Hagrid and Ronan communicate appears to be rather odd. When the half-giant tries to get an answer from the centaur, he:

> [...] didn't answer immediately. He stared unblinkingly upwards, then sighed again. 'Always the innocent are the first victims,' he said. 'So it has been for ages past, so it is now.'
> 'Yeah,' said Hagrid, 'but have yeh seen anythin,' Ronan? Anythin' unusual?'
> 'Mars is britht tonight,' Ronan repeated while Hagrid watched him impatiently. 'Unusually bright.' (185)

While Ronan is making this remark, another centaur, Bane, joins the company. Although he is described as looking wilder than Ronan, he says the same phrase: "Mars is bright tonight" (185). Hagrid's comment on this sentence is quite accurate: "Never [...] try an' get a straight answer out of a centaur Ruddy star-gazers. Not interested in anythin' closer'n the moon" (185). As he continues with "[t]hey're deep, mind, centaurs... they know things... jus' don' let on much" (185), we might be sure enough of their knowledge and customs, which are far from aggressive or savage. When they read from the stars, one of them warns his companion: "Remember, Firenze, we are sworn not to set ourselves against the heavens" (187–188) and to the heavens they are faithful the whole time. Firenze, to save Harry, allows him to ride on his back, which they are not allowed to do. When Bane sees them, he expresses his feelings very clearly:

> 'For the best! What is that to do with us? Centaurs are concerned with what has been foretold! It is not our business to run around like donkeys after stray humans in our Forest!'
> [...] 'Do you not see that unicorn?' Firenze bellowed at Bane. 'Do you not understand why it was killed? Or have the planets not let you in on that secret? I set myself against what is lurking in this Forest, Bane, yes, with humans alongside me if I must.' (188)

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[244]   Centaurs can read the future from the stars. Firenze teaches astronomy in Hogwarts (he joins the wizardry faculty later in the series).

There are certain strategies that centaurs take in their relationships with humans. Some, as Bane, are conservative and distrustful towards wizards, who harmed his kind in the past. Firenze, however, represents a more liberal approach and perceives cooperation with humans as the only way to defeat their common enemy.

In the books, the way the centaurs look is specified: Firenze, the centaur that ended up as a teacher in Hogwarts[245] has white skin and blue eyes, whereas Magorian has a chestnut body and black hair. It is crucial that the white centaur is the one to be included in the Hogwarts community while the others, supposedly of darker skin colour, are still a part of the excluded herd living in the Forbidden Forest. The depiction of those creatures in the movies, especially the first and fifth ones, differ, as all centaurs, including Firenze, are black. This is yet again the issue of the adapted work, where skin colour does play an important role and can raise controversy around the subject of racism and racial representations in popular culture.

Information on centaurs from *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (Rowling, 2009) can be treated as a commentary to what happens in the series. Rowling mostly focuses on the legal issues of the categorization of centaurs in the wizard's artificial hierarchy.[246] We read:

> Being intelligent and capable of speech, it should not strictly speaking be termed a beast, but by its own request it has been classified as such by the Ministry of Magic. [...] The centaur is given an XXXX classification [Dangerous/requires specialist knowledge/ skilled wizard may handle – A.M.] not because it is unduly aggressive, but because it should be treated with great respect. The same applies to merpeople and unicorns. (11)

For centaurs, the agreement to any categorization would be equivalent to betraying their kind and submission to the authority of humans. Presumably, they do not really care how people name them in their language – as long as they are treated with respect for their autonomy. It might also reflect the

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[245]   Excluded by the herd.

[246]   Although the hippogriff as such does not appear either in Greek or Roman mythology, it is used by Rowling as a legendary figure that mainly symbolizes freedom and independence, which is also reserved for animals. In the third book, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, we meet a hippogriff named Buckbeak, mistreated and sentenced to death not because of his aggressive nature, but because of human recklessness and stupidity. In order to approach a hippogriff, one should bow to him and not break eye contact. If he does not bow back, no one should come near this creature or it will attack you. This rule is broken by Draco Malfoy during the Care of Magical Creatures class with Hagrid. Buckbeack attacks the boy, and although he is not seriously injured, Malfoy starts a trial which leads to the death sentence. Only thanks to Harry and Hermione is Buckbeack saved. However, justice in the Wizarding World does not work for magical animals, even if they are innocent. Human comfort will always be a priority, and animals will be treated as second rate creatures.

ongoing battle for human rights for all ethnicities, especially those who pose as a "threat" in Western culture. Either way, in the Harry Potter universe, centaurs are treated and perceived as a separate social community that does not interfere with human affairs, that is, up to the fifth book.

In *Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix* (dir. Yates, 2003), we find out that Firenze betrays the centaurs to help Dumbledore; he is excluded from their community and banished from the Forbidden Forest. Even though the image of the centaurs is seemingly different from the mythological one, later on, Rowling shows that some wizards still believe in the old myths about these creatures. The reminiscences of those prejudices are also present in the book. One scene shows centaurs as confronted by Dolores Umbridge, a villain and future servant – or maybe already then – of Lord Voldemort, the main antagonist, identified as the political evil power investigating Hogwarts. Lured into the Forbidden Forest by Hermione, she expects to discover Dumbledore's secret weapon. Instead, she encounters centaurs, or, as it is figuratively stated by Rowling (2003), the resistant group hiding in the Forest. Umbridge's legitimacy as a member of the Ministry of Magic only makes things worse as she has no authority here. When the centaurs capture her, she screams: "Filthy half-breeds! [...] Beasts! Uncontrolled animals!" (665). The centaurs kidnap her and probably mete out punishment. However, their wild behaviour is not caused by their nature, or only partly so, but by their anger towards the Ministry of Magic that caused them harm and did not show them and their needs any respect. At the moment of confrontation, one of the centaurs says: "We are a race apart and proud to be so" (667), which underlines their separate status and maybe to some extent justifies their behaviour towards humans, who are in this case intruders.

We do not know what really happened deep in the Forbidden Forest and how the centaurs decided to punish Umbridge for the insult. However, the following passage might reveal the secret:

> Professor Umbridge was lying in a bed opposite them, gazing up at the ceiling. Dumbledore had strode alone into the forest to rescue her from the centaurs. How he had done it — how he had emerged from the trees supporting Professor Umbridge without so much as a scratch on him — nobody knew, and Umbridge was certainly not telling. Since she had returned to the castle she had not, as far as any of them knew, uttered a single word. Nobody really knew what was wrong with her either. Her usually neat mousy hair was very untidy and there were bits of twig and leaf in it, but otherwise she seemed to be quite unscathed. "Madam Pomfrey says she's just in shock," whispered Hermione. "Sulking, more like," said Ginny "Yeah, she shows signs of life if you do this," said Ron, and with his tongue he made soft clip-clopping noises. Umbridge sat bolt upright, looking wildly around. "Anything wrong, Professor?" called Madam Pomfrey, poking her head around her office door. "No...

no..." said Umbridge, sinking back into her pillows, "no, I must have been dreaming..." (748)

Although it is not said explicitly that Umbridge was actually raped,[247] it can be read as the exploration of the motif of rape connected to the mythical monster used by J. K. Rowling. An argument proving the possibility of such exploration would be the fact that a human can be attracted to centaurs: in the fifth book, one of the students, Parvati Patil, calls Firenze, now the new divination teacher, 'gorgeous' (528). Even though the 'rape theory' might not seem convincing, the fact of its possibility clashes with the assumption of a racist representation of centaurs in Rowling's narrative. Within the patriarchy, black people very often are accused of being rapists and criminals, who 'hunt' white men's treasures, i.e. noble and vulnerable women. If connected in such a manner, centaurs clearly become 'monsters of colour,' created by J.K. Rowling, intentionally or not.

Jen Harrison (2018) interprets the relation between Dolores Umbridge and the centaurs in the following way:

> What seems to trouble Umbridge most, however, is not the centaurs' "natural" bodies, but their inherent "human" qualities such as intelligence and magical ability. Her fear manifests itself through explicit attempts at control, as she both physically threatens the centaurs with her wand and invokes wizarding law, shouting, "Law Fifteen 'B' states clearly that 'any attack by a magical creature who is deemed to have near-human intelligence, and therefore considered responsible for its actions—'" before being interrupted by a centaur's angry interjection (665). In this interrupted statement Umbridge's use of the passive voice disguises the role of wizards as agents in encoding these humanist values into law, instead implying that a natural and fixed ontological characteristic renders the centaur subject to human control. At the same time, however, her words imply a mistrust of the physical magical abilities symbolized by her wand; it is as if, doubtful of the genuine superiority of humans in terms of ontological ability, wizards need language and law to enforce the hierarchies that they have set up and thus to maintain control of an anthropocentric magical world. As the scene demonstrates, however, this illusion of control is quickly dispelled when the centaurs physically overpower Umbridge, demonstrating their intellectual, magical, and physical equality, if not superiority. Her accusation that they are "Beasts! Uncontrolled animals!" (665) becomes laughable in the face of their uncannily human processes of democratic debate, emotive self-identification, and collective action in response to the threat that she poses. Similarly, Umbridge herself behaves with savagery and a lack of self-control, revealing that form is no indication of "humanity" in her terms. This scene dissolves the false dichotomy by which the human is defined as that which controls the nonhuman. (333)

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[247] Especially if Hermione's and Ginny's reaction to her state is laughter. Cf. Maurice, 2015a.

In her interpretation, Harrison highlights the political aspect of the Umbridge–centaurs conflict. The way both sides behave, talk, etc. stands for the establishment of power that one wants to have over others. Such a relationship refers not only to the anthropocentric point of view that Umbridge represents towards the fantastic beasts. Taking into account the issue of race–wizard and animal, but also white and non-white characters, one might interpret the Umbridge–centaur relationship as that of the white colonizer and non-white representative of an ethnic group, mythical creatures that have been invaded by someone convinced of their superior status. As Alyssa Hunziker (2013) has pointed out, centaurs are 'caged' in the Forbidden Forest, which has become a symbolic establishment of power that the Ministry of Magic has over other-than-wizard species (55).[248] In this case, just like in that of bestiaries, the fantastic sphere is the space where monsters are isolated from the world which does not accept them, and it becomes the only place where those creatures can seemingly feel free and safe.

The main question that arises within these two depictions of centaurs – savage rebels and calm thinkers – is how their status should be established. From the human perspective, these creatures are somewhere between nonhuman animals and *Homo sapiens* – are they human because of their upper part or animal because of the lower one? Rowling focuses on socio-political issues rather than on real-life differentiation and shows how categorization of living creatures can be as unjust as it is unnecessary. However, as Hunziker points out (2013):

> [The] division of racialized communities is echoed by divisions within the human race. Throughout the series, Rowling's text struggles with the idea of normalcy among its human characters as each side of the human race, both magical and muggle, have different criteria for evaluating what is and is not normal. (56)

This literary depiction can be connected to the discourse on non-human animals, human rights movements, involving striving against racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia or antifeminism, as certain groups of people were, or are, excluded from social life as human beings who are not 'normal enough' (Green, 2009). This may also be applied to animal rights movements which try to include animals in the human world not as nourishment or clothing, but as legitimate living creatures (Kruse, 2002: 375–379).

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[248]   Although Hunziker suggests the Forbidden Forest may stand for concentration camps, it is here more likely to be seen as a reserve or some kind of separate camp for an ethnic minority.

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Hunziker (2013) makes a crucial comment on centaurs and the idea of social exclusion:

> Rowling is unclear about whether the centaurs' self-worth stems from a similarly institutionalized form of exclusion. In the same way that wizards are shown to attack members of their own species, such as muggles and squibs (non-magical humans born to magical parents), the centaurs of the Forbidden Forest attack Firenze for helping Harry and remove him from their pack when he begins interacting with wizards, suggesting that centaur culture operates with a similar bent towards exclusivity. (55–56)

Similar – maybe. But the social situation of centaurs and wizards is not, as I believe, the same at all. First of all, we do not have access to the centaurs' affairs to the extent we have in the Wizarding World. Secondly, if we consider centaurs to be representatives of the black community, with their own cultural, historical and social background, such a statement, indicating the two groups share a similar approach to exclusiveness, could be read as 'false symmetry.'

Thomas (2018) has some further concerns considering the depiction of people of colour, students of Hogwarts:

> As a fan of color, I was also curious about what the wizarding world might be like outside England. Without colonialism or slavery, how on earth did Black children end up at Hogwarts with English names? Adoption? Immigration? Or had witches and wizards of color been somehow subjugated – was their magic less powerful? (16)

Not necessarily. Even though Rowling does not explicitly comment on such issues, her other works, such as *History of Magic in America*,[249] shows that she might have neglected some of the research or did not shift her 'white optics' while creating a supposedly inclusive Wizarding World. Her understanding of race might be liberal, but her way of thinking is still set in the old ways.

Another example of racial exclusion seems to be even more complicated, as it explicitly describes the issue of slavery of the separate species. And even though classical mythology might not be a direct cultural inspiration here, I would like to prove its importance in the interpretation of racial-related motifs.

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[249] Working on the material from Pottermore, I analysed this issue with Maciej Skowera (2017).

<div style="text-align:center">Dobby is Free![250]</div>

"Death is the only freedom a slave knows" (dir. Kubrick, 1960) – those words, famously inscribed in popular culture, are associated with the historical figure of Spartacus. This seemingly simple and concise combination of words defining the basic privilege of every creature and the final moment of its existence, reflects the tragedy of the struggle for *eleutheria* ["freedom"], a goal behind which there is nothing but death.

Gaining freedom almost always comes with the ultimate price. In antiquity, with its own variations and differences,[251] slaves often were treated as objects and their masters' property. Although sometimes considered to be on a par with animals, slaves were an important part of the ancient world. What is more, some of it, in a way, survived as a concept for a long time. As Peter Hunt (2018) writes:

> Slavery is a cruel institution, but it was central to ancient Greek and Roman civilization for around a thousand years. The prevalence of classical slavery justifies the claim that, during some periods, Greece and Rome were true "slave societies" just as surely as the pre-Civil War American South. (1)

In ancient times, as in the USA before the Civil War, slaves were often treated like animals. As Amy Ratelle (2015) states:

> Animals and slaves were likened to one another in order for slave owners to justify the ownership and abuse of a human being. Thus, working to undermine the perceived superiority of the master over the slave becomes the cornerstone of both anti-slavery campaigns and the animal rights movement. (28)

Although the vision of ancient slavery seems distant, until recently this phenomenon was actually very close to our times, both in Europe and in the United States.[252] People of African descent were treated as objects or animals as well, and had to fight for their rights, which still are not respected in some parts of the world. The echoes of slavery can still be heard today in what may be surprising, i.e. in literature for the youngest, among others. Although the character of Dobby presented here is not directly connected to classical antiquity, the classical concept of slavery, or rather its **popular idea**, is strongly connected to the studied creatures. Especially, if we consider the colonizing past of Great Britain and racism that follows its history.

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[250]   This part was published under the same title as a draft version of the analysis on the Antipodean Blog in 2019 (Mik, 2019: online).

[251]   Even the definition of slavery has not been developed (duBois, 2009).

[252]   That was already pointed out by Eddo-Lodge and Hunt.

As Hunziker (2013) points out: "One of the more obvious ways Rowling discusses issues of race and racial oppression in the series, is through the status of magical creatures in relation to magical humans" (54). Elves inhabiting the world of Harry Potter have one role assigned to them: to serve wizards without payment or any kind of appreciation. They wear the worst kind of rag they can find and do not own any property. What is also crucial in the analysis of the elves as slave-characters is their lack of ability to speak proper English. As Brycchan Carey (2003) points out:

> Their speech is odd, characterized by pronoun and word-order mistakes, and is reminiscent of 1930s and 40s Hollywood misconceptions of African-American dialects: almost the only representation of African Americans commonly available to British audiences until surprisingly late in the twentieth century. (103)

For Carey the postcolonial reference is clear, as he even wonders if there are 'field-elves' working on wizarding plantations (104). The only way of freeing the elf is to give it a piece of clothing, which they considered to be the worst tragedy that could happen to them. There is nothing about elves in the *History of Hogwarts*,[253] even though "[e]lf enslavement goes back in centuries" (Rowling, 2000: 198); they are evidently excluded from the main discourse in the world of magic.

The first elf that Harry meets is Dobby, serving Malfoys. In the second book the creature visits Harry's bedroom during his stay in the Dursleys' home. He bows to the wizard "so low that the end of its long thin nose touched the carpet," calls him "sir," and saying what an honour it is to finally meet him (Rowling, 1998: 15). Harry struggles to ask 'what' or 'who' is this creature, as if he is wondering whether to treat Dobby as a thing or a person. When the boy asks the elf to sit down, the latter panics, as "Dobby has *never* been asked to sit down by a wizard – like an *equal*" (16). Harry, in his naivety, says to Dobby that he probably had never met "many decent wizards," and then:

> Dobby shook his head. Then, without warning, he leapt up and started banging his head furiously on the window, shouting, 'Bad Dobby! Bad Dobby!' [...]
> 'Dobby had to punish himself, sir,' said the elf, who had gone slightly cross-eyed. 'Dobby almost spoke ill of his family, sir ...'
> 'Your family?'
> 'The wizard family Dobby serves, sir... Dobby is a house-elf – bound to serve one house and one family for ever...'
> 'Do they know you're here?' asked Harry curiously.
> Dobby shuddered.

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[253]   A fictional handbook on the school's history, cited by the characters in the series.

'Oh no, sir, no... Dobby will have to punish himself most grievously for coming to see you, sir. Dobby will have to shut his ears in the oven door for this. If they ever knew, sir – '
'But won't they notice if you shut your ears in the oven door?'
'Dobby doubts it, sir. Dobby is always having to punish himself for something, sir. They let Dobby get on with it, sir. Sometimes they remind me to do extra punishments...'
'But why don't you leave? Escape?'
'A house-elf must be set free, sir. And the family will never set Dobby free... Dobby will serve the family until he dies, sir...'
Harry stared. (16)

Dobby openly admires Harry, and thanks to the boy's lack of knowledge about the wizardry hierarchy and sympathy towards the elf he gains his love and devotion. The humble attitude towards the wizard reflects the hierarchy and relationship between the magical species – elf-servants and wizards-masters (Mendlesohn, 2002). Even though house-elves have great magical power they cannot use it without their masters' permission (Rowling, 1998: 27; Hunziker, 2013: 54). As Hunziker also highlights: "[...] the house elves are so fully entrenched in the dominant culture's rhetoric that they knowingly and compulsively punish themselves for acting outside their masters' orders without having been told to do so" (54–55). The power system is also supported by the notion that only wealthy families with a long wizardry tradition have house-elves as a form of luxury and legitimacy of authority (Rowling, 1998: 28). Just like black servants of the British upper-class' past.

Dobby constantly tries to hurt Harry, although weirdly, with good intentions. As Dobby knew that in Hogwarts great danger awaited the Boy Who Lived[254] he tried to keep him away from the School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Doing something that was for once – against his master's will – and secondly motivated by his own wishes. Both of those motivations were unacceptable among docile and submissive elves. In the end, Dobby is rewarded, and thanks to Harry, he becomes a free elf, the only one of his kind.

Evidently, from the beginning, Dobby had a great potential for rebellion, but not all the elves seek freedom as they neither perceive it as anything significant nor value it. A good example of such an approach is represented by Winky, another elf involved in great wizard affairs. She represents slavery as such and in its worst form, as she does not comprehend the fact that one of her kind, and that of course being Dobby, requires payment for his work (Rowling, 2000: 89).

The only advocate among the wizards and witches who stands up for the elves and wants to include them in the discourse is Hermione. Mocked

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[254]   The Malfoys were Voldemort's supporters.

by her friends and despised by the elves for destroying their world, she is convinced that changing the elves' status and working situation will serve all the members of the wizarding community. She is the first one who openly defines their status as **slavery** (112). Surprisingly, Hermione is the only one who acknowledges their situation as a serious problem. When she stands up for what she believes in, Ron replies: "'Well, the elves are happy, aren't they? [...] "House elves are not supposed to have fun"... that's what she likes, being bossed around ...'" (112) Hermione's reply is more than accurate and refers to many replies in contemporary political debates: "'It's people like you Ron [...] who prop up rotten and unjust systems, just because they're too lazy to – " (112) – and then her speech is interrupted by upcoming events.

There are several confrontational situations that shock Hermione and give her more arguments to fight for the right cause. After Winky's scolding by Mr Crouch, she says:

> 'The way they were treating her' said Hermione furiously. 'Mr Diggory, calling her "elf" all the time... and Mr Crouch! He knows she didn't to it [created the Dark Mark] and he's still going to suck her! He didn't care how frightened she'd been, or how upset she was – it was like she wasn't even human!'
> 'Well, she's not,' said Ron.
> Hermione rounded on him. 'That doesn't mean she hasn't got feelings, Ron, it's disgusting the way –' (125)

And once again she is interrupted, her voice has been cut off. Hermione's protest becomes silent for a short while, as no one seems to hear her. When she finds out about "slave labour" in Hogwarts,[255] she refuses to eat anything (162). Then she realises that this kind of protest will not change much, and she decides to start a legit organisation called SPEW – Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare. The terms are clearly formulated by Hermione:

> 'Our short-term aims [...] are to secure house-elves' fair wages and working conditions. Our long-term aims include changing the law about non-wand-use, and trying to get an elf into the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures, because they're shockingly under-represented.' (198)

The image of Hermione however is not flawless. For example, when with Harry and Ron they learn about Skrewts at the Magical Creatures Care class, she says: "Just because they're not pretty, it doesn't mean they're not useful" (175), and later: "The best thing to do would be to stamp on the lot of them before they start attacking us all" (175). Hermione is not

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[255] Elves, among other services, provide the food for students.

understanding about magical creatures, especially when she has to deal with unpleasant and presumably dangerous ones. It is in contradiction with her image of a fighter in favour of the weaker ones. Being a muggle for once, and additionally a girl in predominantly masculine company, she could serve as a perfect example of the union between women and animals (see Chapter III). However, even Hermione Granger is not perfect after all. In this particular situation Hagrid takes a stand in defence of the Skrewts, as we know now: "Hagrid simply loved monstrous creatures – the more lethal, the better" (175). He is, though, against the house-elves' revolution:

> 'It'd be doin' 'em an unkindness Hermione [...] It's in their nature ter look after humans, that's what they like, see? Yeh'd be makin' 'em unhappy ter take away their work, an' insultin' 'em if yeh tried ter pay 'em.' (233)

It is hard to claim whether Rowling actually criticizes her character's worldview or shares it. Nevertheless, Brycchan Carey (2003) claims that "it seems clear that Rowling has tried to make connections between the house-elves and historical slaves, both in North America and in the British Caribbean colonies" (103-104). This is not only because of their status, but also due to their language, broken English, that "serves as a symbol of their subjugation by hegemonic society, while continuing to highlight house-elves' stark difference from magical humans" (Hunziker, 2013: 55). The role of Dobby seems to be crucial in the slave-oriented narrative. As Hunziker writes: "[...] Dobby forces both the reader, and Harry, someone who is born into the hegemonic dominant class, to read this moment as one in which the house-elf transcends his usual role as a comedic figure in order to decry the effects of institutionalized slavery" (55).

I would like to consider Rowling's views on slavery, expressed through the characters of the house-elves, as an attempt to provoke young readers' thoughts on the subject and leave a space for less didactic and individual reflection. Similarly, Hunziker claims:

> Because institutions of exclusion operate both within the wizarding world, and between wizards and muggles, Rowling successfully allows her reader to fall deeper and deeper into the increasingly complex distinctions that categorize Harry and his classmates as being intrinsically different. This collective exclusion then, allows the wizarding world to be unified through their shared experience, which, in turn, renders them an inclusionary society by virtue of their shared degrees of exclusion. (59)

Eliza Dresang (2002) seems to have similar views on the issue:

> [...] in book four when Hermione comes forth forcefully with her Society for the Protection of Elfish Welfare (S.P.E.W.), the issue of an extended sense of social conscience enters the story. There are implied questions

of race here, although Rowling has not put emphasis on racial differences per se (no racial or ethnic discrimination is directed toward Lee Jordan, Cho Chang, and Parvati Patil). The issues raised and comments made about Muggle blood, giant blood, and elf suppression represent racial as well as class discrimination in these books. (234)

Although that would be an accurate explanation of Rowling's literal strategy, by starting the S.P.E.W. organization by Hermione the author quite likely wanted to present her heroine's traits: determination, a rebellious attitude, and a desperate need to do "the right thing." The matter of slavery has not been elaborated on as much as may have been expected and not developed in a 'liberating' direction, with Hermione being the only one who actually cares about it, which proves the previous claim. Nevertheless, the general image of Hermione Granger is still a more engaged one than Harry Potter's, as Carey (2003) writes:

> [...] Harry's political engagement comes down, in the end, to a personal battle with Voldemort. In contrast to Harry's personal struggle, Hermione's is a public one. She goes to the library and conducts research, she subscribes to newspapers and spars with their reporters, and she sets up campaign groups. Her loyalty, team spirit, and vigilance are as undoubted as Harry's, but she plays the political game in another way. (105)

Hermione seems to understand the concept of 'monsters of colour,' or in this case, wizard 'monsters' that supress the underprivileged group and deny their rights to exist as independent beings. She proves her wisdom throughout the series towards many oppressed creatures, humans included.[256] Hermione Granger certainly might be considered a friend of, at least some, excluded magical monsters.

At the end of the series Dobby dies while rescuing his hero, Harry Potter. On the stone of an improvised grave, the wizard carves the words: *Here lies Dobby, a Free Elf* (Rowling, 2007: 389). A consolation for this sad moment could have been the words of Spartacus from Stanley Kubrick's production: "When a free man dies, he loses the pleasure of life. a slave loses his pain. Death is the only freedom a slave knows. That's why he's not afraid of it. That's why we'll win." Dobby might be the next embodiment of the pop-cultural spirit of Spartacus, *eleutheria* in its pure form, a creature who had to die in order to sustain such a state.

Looking for historical figures fighting for freedom as for a human right, Spartacus certainly would not be the only one. Just to mention Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, an icon and symbol of hope, not only for Afro-Americans, but for everybody experiencing exclusion. Dobby, the house

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[256] Her first encounter with the reader is when she helps Nevil, a struggling student, to find his toad.

elf, certainly carries a great burden, dreaming of freedom not only for himself, but for all his kind. Freedom is a value longed for by all creatures, human, nonhuman, fantastic, monstrous. Proof of this are the similar inscriptions on the graves. As King's says: "Free at last. Free at last. Thank God Almighty. I'm Free at last."

Probably there is a long way ahead for the other house-elves to gain freedom and sustain democratic order in the Wizarding World. Yet, it is not far from the impossible. As Michel Foucault reminds us:

> Liberty is a practice... The liberty of men is never assured by the institutions of law that are intended to guarantee them. This is why almost all of these laws and institutions are quite capable of being turned around. Not because they are ambiguous, but simply because 'liberty' is what must be exercised... [...] The guarantee of freedom is freedom. (Foucault, 1984: 245)

Confronting my research with the Internet and popular views on the said subject, it turns out that there was a similar analysis of the S.P.E.W. movement on Pottermore: *To S.P.E.W. or not to S.P.E.W.: Hermione Granger and the pitfalls of activism*. The author, however, is not mentioned here (2017, online). All the necessary paragraphs from the series are cited, the elfish rights and its necessity acknowledged.

However, Hermione's efforts are quite clearly criticized. The main issue – according to the author – is that she "wants it all and wants it now". They also claim that Hermione's attempt was to change "the world overnight" which "is quite naïve". It is difficult to agree with this as for a young girl, already evoking a lot of prejudices, she showed great courage and determination fighting for what she believed in, and that, as naïve as it may seem, is something to be admired rather than criticized. Although not all of her attempts are executed correctly and well thought through, she certainly presents a progressive idea of freedom for all, and not only for the chosen.

Grover Underwood: a Black Satyr[257]

It is not coincidental that the issues of race, especially concerning black people, is connected with nature. Grover Underwood from the *Percy Jackson* series was the perfect example of a creature connected with Nature in a very literal way, and is still presented in the movie as a black boy. Julia Fiedorczuk (2015) observes that such a phenomenon is indeed very popular:

> Considering human civilization as a monolith, ecocritics were insensitive to differences between people in terms of gender, race, social class, health

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[257]   This part of the analysis is also based on my article on Grover Underwood, recalled in the previous chapter (Mik, 2019).

or worldview. On the other hand, there was a strong tendency to idealise lifestyles that were seen as being "in harmony with nature". In American literature, this tendency was especially relevant for Indians, but also for tribal peoples of Africa. The critic William Slaymaker, a researcher of African literature, coined the lenient term "art d'eco" to emphasise the insignificance of such forms of ecocriticism. Slaymaker noted that from the point of view of African intellectuals, ecological movements are only a transformed form of colonialism. This is due to the conviction that ecological activism "in all shades of green (also in red) is white." (25–26)

As I have already pointed out, the issue described by Fiedorczuk does not only concern American Culture. Nonetheless, in this part of the book I will come back to the 'American' character already analysed in the previous chapter. Here, I will focus on Grover Underwood's depiction in the movie adaptation.

The problem of racism appears in many works adapted for the Big Screen,[258] in which casting or depictions of characters differ from the originals, like in Walt Disney's adaptations of children's books. Numerous examples of such adaptations show that they mainly concern the most popular texts for children, from Lewis Carroll's (orig. 1865, 2001) *Alice* to the mentioned *Harry Potter*.[259] However, the one that I want to focus on in this section is the adaptation of *The Lightning Thief* (the first book of the series *Percy Jackson & the Olympians*) written by Rick Riordan (2005). The book has been adapted into a movie titled *Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief* (dir. Columbus, Rosenfelt, Barnathan, & Radcliffe, 2010)[260]. The director of this film and of the first two *Harry Potter* movies, Chris Columbus, adjusted quite a lot that have probably functioned better in the cinematic world than if taken directly from the novels, e.g. he made Percy older (from 12 to 16), changed several key-locations, etc. (MacNeill, 2018). In this part, however, I will not list all the things that have been changed. Instead, I would like to focus on the character whose representations in the book and the movie – probably for different reasons – are particularly interesting in the context of the

[258] This phenomenon concerns not only children's culture and not necessarily race. Similar cases would be, for example, a German actress cast as Helen in *Troy* (Petersen, Rathbun, & Wilson, 2004), Helen being identified as a Greek woman, or a woman playing Doctor Who (Chibnall, Strevens, & Hoyle, 2018) – previously played only by men.

[259] The phenomenon of adaptation includes multiple controversies: among them would be the question of the canon, for example: is Tim Burton's: *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) a part of it? Are the new movies by D. Yates and J.K. Rowling (*Fantastic Beasts* series) part of a Harry Potter transfictional world? Those issues, however, require further and separate research.

[260] The book series was very often compared to the *Harry Potter* novels; the fact that the first *Percy Jackson* movie was directed by Chris Columbus even strengthens the connection between those two universes.

ideology of adaptation: a satyr named Grover Underwood, Percy Jackson's best friend.

The case of Grover Underwood discussed in the previous chapter is particularly interesting, as it combines two issues: disability and race. Analysed separately, they can be connected to those specific fields. However, if we consider the character from the books and the movies as one, he might be presented as another, intersectional character, just like Hephaestus or Rubeus Hagrid, presenting common issues of those forms of exclusion. Hence, for the sake of the analysis, I would like to start with the presentation of Grover from the movies, omitting the mythological reference, as it was presented in the previous chapter, and, as I believe, is still strictly connected to both disability and racism.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the issue of a black Hermione aroused controversies and provoked a discussion about racism in the UK. Reni Eddo-Lodge (2017), the scholar researching and describing structural racism, devoted several paragraphs to this particular case in her book *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race*. Black Grover Underwood's case, however, was not as controversial in America as the black Hermione one was in Britain.

In the movie Grover Underwood is played by a black actor, Brandon T. Jackson. He has – at first glance – similar functions as he had in the book: the protector of Percy, played by a white actor, Logan Lerman, and his faithful companion. The movie Grover still pretends to be crippled and 'becomes' a satyr in the moment of need. Nevertheless, the general depiction of this character is quite different from the book for several reasons. Specifying the satyr's skin colour might be one of them, especially considering the history and current situation of black people in the United States.

First of all, it seems quite risky to cast a black person in the role of a half-animal beast that, in classical mythology, was presented as a creature that was always sexually unsatisfied and often violent towards women. It seems to be common knowledge that many prejudices from white people towards black men are focused around their alleged intensified sexual needs and belief that they wait to seize their innocent white wives, as in the case of *The Birth of a Nation* by D. W. Griffith (1915). Secondly, for being half-goat, the satyr-like character implies many animal or animal-like traits that also play dangerously with the idea of a black man, often compared to unreasoning animals that 'real' humans feel superior to (Fryer, 1984: 175). Those two issues should have appeared even before casting a black actor, and if so, they should be somehow highlighted and reflected on in the movie.

Another race-related association that comes to mind after juxtaposing the book and the movie figures is the type of relationship between Percy and Grover. Although Grover was already subordinate towards Percy in

the book, in the movie the relationship between the boys is even more unsettling. Grover is Percy's sidekick, he does whatever Percy wants him to do, even if it is camouflaged by friendship between them. When they think that Percy's mother has died, Grover blames himself for not protecting Percy's family well enough. He is ready to take the punishment as he later does by staying in Hades.[261]

In the movie, Grover loses almost every 'magical' trait that he had as a satyr in the book. He does not talk to animals anymore and he does not sense human emotions. His basic task is to tell a joke once in a while to reduce the epic or even pathetic atmosphere of the story. His satyr attributes – besides his physical appearance – are the tendency to flirt with girls[262] and gamble. The depiction of a young black boy in Columbus's movie is simplified and shallow, as the director neither makes use of the cultural heritage of African Americans nor does he comment on their current social and cultural status. Grover is just a funny half-goat man, balancing the heaviness of the epic character of Percy, the white hero of the mythological story.

The already mentioned Eddo-Lodge (2017) presented in her work the idea of structural racism in Britain. It is based on the assumption that racial exclusion lies within political, cultural and social structures that have enormous influence on black people's lives.[263] Eddo-Lodge's book is addressed primarily to white readers, also to those who claim to be antiracists, who all too often do not acknowledge sometimes very complicated cultural processes that impact the functioning of society. Eddo-Lodge analysed numerous cases from the political and cultural world[264] involving 'controversies' around the topic of black people's presence in the main discourse, or lack of it. The case of Grover Underwood would probably be another one, but taken from the United States of America.

Eddo-Lodge's work is maybe not of primary importance in this field, but it is one of the most powerful and popular texts published recently, and has opened up a discussion about racism that is still going on. Also Shirley Jean Better (2008) writes that:

> Cultural blindness and deafness relates to the unwillingness to acknowledge that racism is not simply the resistance of the few to equality for all, but the refusal to witness the imbedded inequality that exists within the very social institutions that maintain the society. (25)

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[261]   It is also indicated that Grover will have sex with the wife of Hades, the Black Persephone, because an affair between them is outlined by Persephone's words: "I haven`t had a Satyr...visit before!" Then she touches his body with her fingers lasciviously. After this implicit sexual initiation Grover even has got a pair of small horns on his head.
[262]   Not necessarily human ones – satyrs particularly enjoy the company of nymphs.
[263]   As well as other minorities.
[264]   Vide the Black Hermione case.

It seems like none of the creators of *The Lightning Thief* movie adaptation have actually seen any problem with depicting Grover in such a stereotypical way, as 'cultural blindness' certainly affected them. While we are not able to fully analyse the racial depiction of Grover in the book, in the movie a lot of audio-visual elements[265] may indicate that this character was created from a very 'white' perspective.

On the one hand, Grover clearly plays the role of a classic 'sidekick' character, with his ability to explain to Percy the intricacies of the mythological world, guide him, help him and tell a joke once in a while. On the other hand, he might be a part of tokenism: putting a black character in the cultural text just to forestall accusations about not involving minorities in the production, or excluding the minority from the cultural discourse. Besides Grover, we barely encounter any black characters[266] in the movie: the main protagonists and antagonists, gods and goddesses are almost all white. The only goddess[267] played by a black actress is Persephone (Rosario Dawson), a character supressed by the dominating white god Hades, and Hephaestus (Conrad Coates), also in a way excluded from Olympus as a 'lesser' god. The depiction of the black minority in *The Lightning Thief* is poor and lacks any commentary from the creators, at the same time standing as a lost opportunity to raise important topics on social issues.

Grover's blackness in the movie is also associated with the nonhuman animality of his lower body part. In the books, he also eats cans and bleeps like a goat. But a black character behaving like an animal indicates, unfortunately, the mistreatment of this minority in times of slavery and, what comes with it, the whole issue of the cultural heritage of black people in America. African Americans were treated by white people like animals and, what is more, in certain periods they were used in freak shows as so-called 'natural curiosities' (Sani, 2013: 56); we also have the case of including black people in the European 'menageries' (Wieczorkiewicz, 2009: 62). Even if the creators of the movie did not intend to create such an image, the mistake of delivering this very depiction is highly disturbing.

The first book from the *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* series is one of two that have been filmed; the second movie is *The Sea of Monsters* (dir. Rosenfelt, Barnathan, & Freudenthal, 2013). The cinematic series has not been continued, probably because of its low popularity. There have been some rumours concerning a Netflix reboot of the series, but they have not been confirmed. Besides the movies, there has also been an off-Broadway musical, *The Lightning Thief* (2017), where Grover is also

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[265]   The way Grover talks is also very stereotypical of Blacks, his dialectal speech betraying his origins.
[266]   Or rather black actors playing the characters.
[267]   Among the few introduced in the movie.

played by a representative of a minority.[268] However, in comparison to the *Harry Potter* series, the *Percy Jackson* film series did not achieve such a level of popularity and has not become a transmedial worldwide phenomenon. As Walter Benjamin writes, it is an art to repeat a story,[269] and also to adjust it to current trends and needs. So if other movie adaptations of the books are made, hopefully Grover Underwood, the mythological satyr, will fight for his rightful voice instead of bleeping for help.

Not only satyrs might become a doubtful and maybe even unintentional metaphor of black people. What would be disturbing is that another depiction of mythical creatures might play such a role: mermaids (sirens) that already have appeared in this book on multiple occasions. Looking at the animations from the 21st century allow us to determine to what extent 'monsters of colour' have been accepted in pop-culture society.

Under the Monstrous Sea: a Long Way to Go

Mythological 'monsters of colour' are not something to find easily at the turn of the 21st century, which might reflect the ideological change that happened, not only in popular culture, but in different societies as well, awareness concerning the issue of racism – not only in children's culture – being frequently taken into consideration. However, although there is still a long way to go to fully understand and to solve the problems regarding race and racism, it is worth following a selected number of cases illustrating this issue. Interestingly, all of them are connected with water monsters.

Beasts of Olympus (2015-2018) is a series of short stories written by Lucy Coats and illustrated by Brett Bean, already mentioned in Chapter II. It is about a young boy, Demon, who is a sort of beast himself. He was taken from his mother by the god Pan – his father – to Olympus to become a Beast Keeper. In every part of the series[270] he deals with different problems concerning the well-being of the various mythical creatures. Although they are mostly health-related issues, 'the real trouble' is almost always caused by a selfish and stubborn god or goddess. Demon, with his 'magical box' and animal-advisors, helps to find a cure for or solution to all kinds of problems, but what is almost always tested is his courage and determination. It seems to be very interesting that potential readers get to know the myths not through the main, human protagonists, but through animal-like creatures which have been previously neglected or at least decentralized in the 'original' story. Various aspects of monstrosity appearing in the series will be discussed in greater detail in the next

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[268] George Salazar, a member of the original cast, is half Filipino, half Ecuadorian.
[269] As cited in Hutcheon, 2013: 2.
[270] In the next chapter I analyse eight that were released up to 2018.

chapter. Here, I would just like to point to one motif concerning 'monsters of colour,' as, if not most important to the whole story, I believe it still represents a minority in a subtle manner.

In the third part of the series: *Steeds of Gods* (2015c) Demon is forced, as he usually is, to assist Poseidon in his steeds race with Helios. To do that, he goes underwater. In the god's kingdom he meets Eunice, a black Nereid who becomes his friend, the first one of the same age in the series. During their brief conversation, Demon finds out how Eunice feels trapped in her community and tries to emancipate herself: "I'm so bored of their [her sisters] fancy jewellery-trying-on parties and silly gossip. I want to do something interesting. I wish I could have a proper job like you – I'd love to look after the Hippocamps" (24). Eunice rejects activities culturally assigned to young girls. She does not want to participate in the life offered to her by society and is looking for something truly interesting. She also wants a job that for many centuries was assigned to men. Eunice wants to change her status from passive Nereid to active mythical care taker.

From the text itself it is hard to determine what skin colour Eunice is – she is excluded as a girl and as a sea creature, but not necessarily for her ethnic roots. That, however, changes if we consider the illustrations being an inseparable part of the story. A black-skinned girl demanding her rights to decide about her fate inscribes this motif into the intersectional discussion, where exclusion is a marker of gender, race and social status.[271] Eunice is *par exellence* 'a monster of colour,' looking for acceptance and the possibility of social and cultural fulfilment.

Similarly, an alienated sea creature appears in the animated series *Gravity Falls*,[272] already discussed in Chapter III. In the episode *The Deep End* (S01E06), on a very hot day, all the residents and workers of Mystery Shack go to the public swimming pool. There, Mabel meets a "mystery loner," a handsome man who never leaves the pool and covers his lower body parts with a floating mattress. He speaks with a Spanish accent and communicates in a very dramatic manner (he has a "terrible secret!"); he has long hair, dark skin, and a fish tail instead of legs. His name is Mermando and he is a merman – probably of Mexican origin.

As we hear from the merman himself, Mermando was caught by a fisherman who wanted to sell him to the Bait Shop in Gravity Falls. However, he managed to escape from the cruel man's cargo and with the help of forest animals[273] he survived and ended up in the swimming pool, where he is now stuck. Mermando misses his family and life in the ocean. Even though Mabel likes him very much and imagines their

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[271]   Nereids, just like in classical mythology, serve Poseidon.
[272]   *The Deep End* is the highest rated (by the viewers) episode of the series. It was watched by 4.5 million viewers on the night of its first broadcast on Disney Channel.
[273]   They licked him and in this way he remained hydrated.

love blooming in Gravity Falls, she decides to do the right thing and helps Mermando return to the sea. At the end of the episode, Mermando fulfils Mabel's wish and they share a romantic kiss. Since then, all of his seventeen hearts beat only for Mabel.

Classical mythology in *The Deep End* has been transformed with the help of popular culture. We do not deal here with ancient sirens who lured sailors into the depths of the sea with their song, but with a merman who does not appear in contemporary culture very often.[274] Mermando can sing and play the guitar, and his musicality is connected to both the cultural heritage of his 'human part'[275] and to his 'animal part'.[276] While he does not use his powers to seduce or use Mabel, it certainly is part of his irresistible charm.

Even though he is polite and treats Mabel with respect, Mermando manifests signs of depression. He cannot enjoy his food or play with Mabel, even though she offers him all kinds of entertainment. What is clear is that he does not belong to 'this world.' As a mythical creature he has to go back to his home, the Gulf of Mexico, where he was captured by sailors. That, however, does not stand in his way to begin a romantic relationship with Mabel, to whom later he will send love letters in bottles.[277]

Mermando has the voice of a grown man, and incidentally, he also speaks 'dolphin'; he claims to be 12 years old, as merpeople mature very early. This conventionally romantic character has something in common with Harlequin heroes known from fantasies for women. In a way, they play the same role as sirens in antiquity; they too hypnotise their victims with romantic notions far removed from real life. When Mabel sees Mermando for the first time, she is charmed by his looks,[278] she runs to the pool, tripping over repeatedly. As a mermaid and Mexican he poses as a monster for two different reasons: as a mythical creature and as a foreigner. At the end of the episode, Mabel is able to let him go, resisting his romantic appeal, and at the same time, she grows into a young woman who is not blinded by a man's pretty face.

Another Hispanic character entangled in the issues concerning the diversity in popular culture is Puss in Boots from the *Shrek* spin-off TV-series: *The Adventures of Puss in Boots*. At the beginning of the episode *Mermaid* (S02E03, dir. Juwono, 2015), Puss is facing the fact that he is not as charming as he assumed he was and fails in the search for a casual

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[274]   In most cases we deal with females.
[275]   Again, he is Mexican.
[276]   As a merman, descendant of sirens, he has the power to attract people with his songs.
[277]   The last one appears in the second season of the series, when he is announcing his engagement to the Queen of Manatees, which was purely a political arrangement.
[278]   The voice 'factor' comes in later – here Mermando differs from the ancient sirens.

romance. He cannot stand the mockery and decides to change his public opinion of a man having 'made-up' girlfriends all over the world.

Having a sort of breakdown Puss rides a horse to the lake, where he hears "heavenly sounds." The cat follows it and sees a beautiful mermaid, whose face we cannot see, sitting on a rock, looking at the sun. After a close-up we see her dark skin and black dreadlocks, which already stand for a double form of exclusion: being a mermaid and being black. Shortly, two men appear out of nowhere and attack the creature. Puss sees that and defeats the oppressors.

The cat finds his 'damsel in distress' in the nearby woods. As he tries to approach her, she shows her face which is nothing like the common notion of a beautiful mythological creature. She has big red eyes, wide thick lips, a 'bony' face and sharp teeth. She introduces herself as Feejee, which most probably is an allusion to the famous 'real' mermaid, 'caught' by sailors in the 19th century (see Chapter III). She chases Puss who, seemingly disgusted by her looks, seems to be scared, even though in the previous scene he was charmed when hearing her voice.

Ultimately, after just a brief conversation and a few jokes, Puss warms up to her, as if looks do not matter to him anymore, or maybe remorse catches up. They go back to the city together for a drink in the local bar. During their date the presence of Feejee is questioned by other citizens as they do not treat her as a 'real woman,' but as some sort of creature.[279] Then she insists on singing them her song, which is as follows:

> Fishy bottoms, monkey face,
> Lovely as can be.
> Handsome stripy orange fur
> You're the cat for me.
> But if you ever leave me
> I'll hunt you down.
> I'll skin you like a rodent
> And put you in the ground.

Not only is she a monster *par excellence* just from being a mermaid, she openly threatens Puss,[280] which also connects the character to the *femme fatale* figure. Feejee is cruel: she says that she used a baby squid for a pen and tries to attack a little girl simply out of jealousy. Feejee makes a high-pitched sound that humans are not able to stand and can be deadly. She refuses to go back home and stays with Puss as his partner.

Eventually, the cat cannot stand her company and tries to get rid of the mermaid – with not much success. She turns out to be an obsessive maniac, behaving compulsively and very possessively towards Puss. The cat

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[279]   Which clearly is the case of a mermaid.
[280]   Who at the beginning naively does not notice a threat.

gets so desperate that he plans to simulate his own death. When Feejee is convinced her lover is dead, she shrieks so loudly that Puss cannot help but 'come to life' again in order to save the citizens. The mermaid reads that as a sign and insists they get married. The wedding however is interrupted by Feejee's boyfriend Fred. They had a fight and all the hassle around Puss was motivated by love for someone else, simply to make him jealous. And it worked. Fred now thinks of them as mer-us:[281] he proposes to Feejee to 'mer-marry' him and, of course, she says yes.

Mythological siren roots are explicitly explored in this animation. At its beginning it is the sound of Feejee's voice that lures Puss and creates his idea of a beautiful mermaid. What is more, she is dangerous, deadly, and does not accept compromises, which also reminds us of the image of a siren known from classical mythology. But I believe this time antiquity did not serve her image well.

The case of Feejee would be similar to Grover's. There is seemingly nothing wrong to present someone as half-animal, and yet, there is something very disturbing about this image being combined with the presentation of a black person. Feejee is shown in a very stereotypical way, not only because of her looks that clearly allude to a black woman, not to mention the 'monkey face' part being an actual offence towards black people, but also her behaviour: bad manners, being loud and overly confident. What is more, she contrasts with the local community, not only because of her fish part, but, most importantly, because of the colour of her skin.[282] Also, the fact that she ends up marrying someone of her own 'species'[283] proves the theory of social exclusion based on spieciesm and racism.

Although there is no secondary literature concerning the animation, there is an article on this episode on *Black Girl Nerds* by Guest Blogger from 2016. They say:

> The Adventures of Puss in Boots (DreamWorks Animation) is a perfect example of how a children's show can introduce concepts of anti-blackness and perpetuate racial stereotypes that ultimately create narratives that are harmful to children of color. [...] Putting cornrows/dreadlocks on Feejee, in my mind, immediately identifies her as being black, and mixed with her exaggerated features, I can't help but think back to the racist cartoon caricatures that date back to the "good ole days." [...]When characters like Feejee are shown with this hairstyle, they're telling little black girls that their hair is disgusting. That they are other, less than, unwanted, and unattractive. That what makes a girl ugly is large lips, dark skin and black hair. That the only time a mermaid is considered beautiful is if she has

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[281]   Him being a merman and her a mermaid.
[282]   All the characters are either animals or white.
[283]   Fred is also a merman, he is black and has similar features.

pale skin and flaming red hair. That beautiful black mermaids do not exist, but monkey-fish with cornrows do.

The author also mentions the allusion to slavery, which is even more disturbing and simply wrong. The *Mermaid* episode only proves that there is still a long way ahead to get rid of the hurtful stereotypes and move forward to a world where there no longer are 'black monsters' created by a far worse 'white society.'

In contemporary popular culture we might encounter various strategies concerning the representation of any minority, also Afro-Americans, with the aim to rather include them in the main discourse. As already mentioned, Walt Disney Pictures created the first black princess in *The Princess and the Frog* (Musker & Clements, 2009), and the studio's remakes of its classic animations included black actors, for example in *Cinderella* (Kinberg, Barron, Shearmur, & Branagh, 2015) and in *Beauty and the Beast* (Hoberman, Lieberman, & Condon, 2017), but unfortunately they are only another example of tokenism, symbolic inclusion to fake the equal representation of minorities. There is also a black superhero in Marvel's *Black Panther* (Feige, Frant, & Coogler, 2018) that was called "a subversive and uproarious action-adventure, in which African stereotypes are upended and history is rewritten" (Bradshaw, 2018), which is probably the proper example of progress in thinking about contemporary culture and the need for change. Another example of a real big step towards equalization in American culture was the Broadway musical *Hamilton* created by Lin-Manuel Miranda and Thomas Kail (2015). The history of founding the United States and of the nation's hero – Alexander Hamilton – is rewritten into hip-hop songs, and many well-known characters from history[284] are played by non-white actors.[285] This is the material for another whole analysis, but the example of such practices shows that an evolution in thinking about representations of minorities is happening before our eyes. Being five years 'older,' *The Lightning Thief* is not very distant in time to *Hamilton* , and in this light it may seem to be regressive and even offensive.

Thomas (2018) underlines that most of the popular depictions of marginalized groups end up as "stereotypes or caricatures" (7). What is more, she wonders if that would be one of the reasons why young black people, for example, are not drawn to literature and other cultural representations. It is not because they do not want to participate in culture, but because there is no representation **of them** in those cultures: they might have a problem of mirroring themselves in the characters they see (7), maybe similarly to Riordan's son, who started to read about

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[284]   E.g. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson.
[285]   The concept of a musical is based on the so-called 'race swap.'

a character that was **just like him**. That remains the case of all excluded beasts, not only those marginalized by the colour of their skin.

In 2019 another 'controversial' casting was announced: the role of Ariel, a Disney mermaid, was about to be played by black actress Halle Bailey. But for people like Tracey Baptiste (online), the author of the article: "Mermaids Have Always Been Black," there was no surprise at all – for her it was absolutely the right choice. Not only is a strong suggestion that Caribbean and African folklore might be explored, but also that classical tradition is not all that white after all, as Baptiste compares her father to the god Poseidon.[286] But antiquity, which has to be stressed here, is certainly not the only key to interpreting mythical content in popular culture. What Baptiste also states is that:

> [t]he focus on Eurocentric stories and storytelling has done us a disservice, leaving us most totally ignorant of the fact that mermaid stories have been told throughout the African continent for millenniums. Mermaids are not just part of the imagination, either, but a part of the living culture.

The above presented analysis of 'monsters of colour' in relation to antiquity and reception studies is just one of many possibilities. As I looked for traces of classical mythology in the texts above, there are certainly many more tropes to unravel in the context of non-mainstream cultures and traditions. Combining many approaches might give a broader outlook on depictions of 'monsters of colour,' and hopefully, such an analysis will shed light on even more issues.

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[286]   As she remembered him from her childhood.

CHAPTER VI:
MONSTROUS CHILDREN

Figure 6. A faun — a childhood companion

> *Go on my son and remember you are walking not flying wings are only an ornament and you tread on a meadow that warm gust is the balmy earth of summer and that colder one is just the running stream the sky is filled with leaves and little animals*
> Zbigniew Herbert, *Dedalus and Icarus*, trans. Valles, orig. 1956, 2007.

As it is impossible to give a general definition of the word 'monster' (see Chapter I), the same issue applies to the notion of the 'monstrous child.' In Western history of childhood, we come across at least several constructs related to this figure: divine little creatures inhabiting the world of classical mythologies[287]; deformed children of the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, manifestations of the evil (Wieczorkiewicz, 2009: 14); romantically idealised children, seeing into other worlds (Kubale, 1984). Those constructs, even if varied, constituted the Western image of the child as someone (or something) 'nonhuman,' different than adults. Essentially, up to the 18th century, in Western culture it is more likely to encounter child-like characters with 'magical' or 'monstrous' qualities than 'normal' children. Reider Aasgaard (2006) observes that in antiquity:

> Children were [...] very often viewed as liminal beings. As not-fully-human they were seen as beings on the threshold of another world, who in their purity were able to mediate truths from the gods. Children's roles in Graeco-Roman religions as oracles and as partakers in religious processions may reflect this. (31)

That idea of the child was popular for a very long time, not only in the classical world: frequently, children mattered only if they had 'special abilities.'[288] Otherwise, they were perceived as 'little adults,' meant to be formed to become a proper adult. It was up to the 16th/17th centuries that childhood was perceived as an early stage of humanity (Ariès, 1962)[289]; nonetheless, as 'imperfect humans,' children were not thought to be fully-fledged subjects (Wolff, 2013; Kennedy, 2006).

That changed with, among others, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his pioneering work on childhood: *Emile, or On Education* (orig. 1762, 2009; Archard, 1993: 30).[290] In this book, the philosopher "positioned childhood within a utopian [imagery – A.M.] of nature, conjoined within a separate

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[287]   The topics of children and childhood are not very popular among classical sources (Aasgaard, 2006: 25). However, there are several studies of childhood in the ancient world (Grubbs, Parkin, 2013; Cohen, Rutter, 2007; Laes, Vuolanto, 2016).
[288]   The vital example would be Jesus, the marvellous child.
[289]   However, there are studies that argue Ariès' theories and prove that children were acknowledged in prior cultures (Orme, 2001: 4–5).
[290]   The history of the child and childhood is far more complex than recalled in this chapter. However, this book does not concern the construct of a child, at least, not in

space of purity, truth and innocence, and needing careful protection from the corrupting influences of adult human society (or culture)" (Taylor, Blaise, 2016: 48). What is more, he "advises that children optimally should be kept from adult society so that they may cultivate an innocent and more direct connection to the natural world" (Faulkner, 2016: 86). The child no longer supposed to be a miniature adult, but a separate autonomous being, with its own needs, thoughts, and self-consciousness.

In *Emile*, 'monsters' (*les monstres*) appears in several paragraphs. Rousseau (2009) stated that if humans were left to themselves after they were born, without any education and social upbringing, one would be "more of a monster than the rest" (10). Later on, he also highlighted that: "A man who knew nothing of suffering would be incapable of tenderness towards his fellow-creatures and ignorant of the joys of pity; he would be hard-hearted, unsocial, a very monster among men" (112). He often acknowledged the fact that without education children would not develop properly. According to Rousseau, "[t]here could be no monster more detestable than a harsh and avaricious child, who realised what he was asked to give and what he refused" (175). Here, the philosopher – to a certain extent – confirms the possibility of monstrosity concerning children who have the potential of being 'less human.'

Some of Rousseau's postulates may seem odd from the perspective of, for instance, contemporary education. He claimed that children, boys to be exact, ought to be raised without any strict rules and imposed education. That should come from experience and observing one's surroundings. Adults ought to supervise children's education, guide their development, but not force anything on them. Pupils should learn most of all from nature that surrounds them as it gives the best examples. Even if controversial at the beginning of the 21st century,[291] Rousseau's work was one of the first pedagogical strategies presented to a wider audience. He acknowledged the child in the main discourse and pointed to children's importance in constructing a modern society.

From then on, the Western concept of childhood multiplied and developed in various directions, but as this is not the subject of my studies, I will not attempt to list them all (Kehily, 2009). However, one of the most important concepts in the context of my analysis would be the enfant terrible, the devilish figure of the child whose depictions varied in 19th-century works, also being very close to the 'monstrous child.' Another name for it would be that used by Katarzyna Slany (2014), i.e. the *puer horroris*. She explains: "This figure breaks the framework of normality, first – by persecuting, and then – by dethroning the former enforcers

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a direct way. The mentioned aspects of childhood serve here as a context to discuss the 'monstrous child' figure, therefore, the monstrosity is a prior feature.
[291]   As it was also in his times, for different reasons.

of the social order" (205), present in the 19th century or possibly even earlier. Both the *enfant terrible* and the *puer horroris* are in close relation to the 'monstrous child' who will always stand in opposition to the superior and 'fully developed' adult.

Recalling such discussions serves to depict the problematic status of the child that eludes the final categorisation and which great thinkers and scholars have been struggling with since the 18th century. The concepts of childhood and the child, described in 1962 by Philippe Ariès (*Centuries of Childhood*),[292] are still something unformed, unknown, sometimes even disturbing. Since then the 'monstrous child' has not stopped developing and is still growing to 21st-century expectations. Keeping those complex constructs in mind, it is worth highlighting the powerful metaphor that the child can be in popular discourse that does not always acknowledge its rich history. As Stephani Etheridge Woodson (1999) claims:

> Childhood is not universal [...]. Humans, indeed most species, must necessarily experience biological immaturity, but childhood is the manner in which a society understands and expresses that physical reality. Viewed in this light, **the child becomes a metaphor** – a pattern of meaning – and childhood can be conceived of as "culturally specific sets of ideas and philosophies, attitudes and practices" (James and Prout 1). Unlike gender or race, **childhood is a temporary and temporal classification**; however, it can be understood in much the same manner – as sets of power relationships revolving around different axes. Much in the way that early feminists separated gender from sex and deconstructed understanding of "natural," the diverse ways in which American culture shapes and understands the child can be unpacked and explored. (31; emphasis added)

Two vital characteristics of childhood as a concept, listed by the scholar, would be, in my opinion, a metaphor and temporality. Both strongly connect the child to monstrosity, which also is metaphoric and temporal (see Chapter I). What makes this comparison even stronger is another fact pointed out by Woodson:

> Children by their nature and presence locate a challenge to the social order, and challenges are hazardous. If a child is unable or unwilling to conform to expected socialization parameters, that child is labelled deviant or poorly socialized. An "uncontained" child then becomes a "dangerous" child. [...] Children [...] are the new "dangerous classes" making it difficult to distinguish between the help we offer them and the control we impose. (34)

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[292]   Edition translated into English, originally it was published in 1960 in French under the title: *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime.*

The category of "dangerous classes," recalled by the author, could again be applied to any excluded social group that representatives of normative societies do not know how to classify. Nonetheless, it is yet another element of the idea of the child that brings it closer to the monster, which is dangerous by its very nature. As Woodson continues: "Childhood represents a dangerous and chaotic variable within social reality and 'needs' to be contained, and regulated" (38) in the same way as any other non-normative social representation. Such a statement is also made by Katarzyna Slany (2017a):

> The strangeness of a child in contemporary children's literature is connected to otherness. The other is always not-ours, undefined, threatening and even though a stranger does not have to evoke similar negative associations, it nevertheless constitutes a sense of incompatibility of the hero with a particular social group, a sense of not being classified, physically [...] and ontologically liminal, who has to answer the question of who he is and what community he belongs to and wants to belong to. (16)

Not only are children connected to otherness, but also – according to Slany (2014) – the child in general has always existed in direct relation to horror (12). In her work, *Groza w literaturze dziecięcej* [Horror in Children's Literature], she starts her analysis with the Grimm brothers' folk and fairy tales (1812-1815) and presents the *homo macabris*, 'a horrifying man,' also related to the *puer horroris* that she introduces later on (9)[293]. The scholar highlights the fact that children love monsters and everything that is scary. They like to be scared, at least in the context of children's play (9).[294] Even though there seems to be a lot of literature on 'evil children,' not to mention the most famous and most horrific *Struwwelpeter* (Hoffmann, orig. 1854, 2018),[295] it is worth pointing out that "the monstrous child appears to be the product of a late Victorian culture forced to pit child-idealization against theories of brutal primitivism" (Bohlmann, Moreland, 2015: 4). As Markus P. J. Bohlmann and Sean Moreland claim:

> While various historical, social, and intellectual trends (including the lingering ideological spectres of Puritanism, Romanticism, and Victorianism, the abolishment of child labor, the post-World War II

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[293]   Here, Maria Konopnicka's literary fairy tale *O krasnoludkach i sierotce Marysi* (1896) [Mary and the Dwarfs]] is also worth mentioning. Although it is a different tradition from myths, some similarities can be found, such as the cyclical seasons and the division of the world into a real (human) and fantastic (dwarfs) sphere. Also, the dwarf figure itself can be treated as monstrous.

[294]   Slany alludes here to the work of Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantments* (1976). Nowadays, however, this work proves to be less valid and even compromised, hence I will not refer to it in the course of my analysis.

[295]   A German book with rhymed stories and morals presenting terrible consequences to those children that misbehave.

advent of attachment parenting, a growing generation gap, and many more) are factors which clearly influence the sustained popularity and pervasiveness of cinema's monstrous children, none of these factors is in and of itself sufficient to explain either the longevity or the variety of this fecund trope. (9–10)

For those and many other reasons the concepts of childhood and monstrosity often merge in literature and horror films featuring monstrous children. In the context of antiquity and its reception, it is necessary to recall 'the monstrous child' inspired by classical mythology, that is Peter Pan from J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*. The rebel child known from *Peter and Wendy* (play 1904, novel 1911) carries multiple features of his mythical ancestors: not only his pipes and rides on a goat, but also wild temper and a certain kind of recklessness. Then again, he can be recognised as a monstrous child. Peter does not grow up, he does not belong to the natural order of things, he kidnaps children from their homes while chasing his own shadow in the dark. Nonetheless, the growing tendency to publish literary works depicting evil children has been noticed since the 1950s (Renner, 2013: 1). One of the most important ones would probably be *The Lord of the Flies* by William Golding (1954), which contains a strong depiction of 'evil' children who, when not supervised, become monsters. From the 1960s, one of the famous monstrous child would be *Rosemary's baby* from Ira Levin's (1967) book. As Karen J. Renner (2013) points out, it is "a story about the most evil child of them all: the son of Satan himself" (3). Both the book and the movie adaptation under the same title by Roman Polański (1968) had a great impact on later works. Renner recalls:

> [...] the 1970s produced so many fictional evil children that one Newsweek editorial worried that the era was one of "growing anti-child sentiment," pointing to a recent poll of 10,000 mothers, 70% of whom said that if given the choice again, they would opt not to have children. (3)

The concept of the 'evil child' is, however, still a taboo subject as the Christian vision of a sacred child, the purest being Jesus Christ himself, has, along with the later Victorian idea of a pure child, dominated the main discourse. In the 20th century the presence of the 'evil child' was strengthened by a figure presented by Sigmund Freud in 1913 when he described children as sinful creatures in his work *Totem and Taboo: Resemblances between the Psychic Lives of Savages and Neurotics*. Although the later development of modern pedagogy subverted similar theories, the idea of 'the monstrous child' remains in Western culture to this day.

'The monstrous child' evokes fear or is created from fear. At the beginning of her article, "Obcość jako kategoria interpretacyjna w badaniach nad dzieciństwem i literaturą dla dzieci" [Foreignness as

an Interpretative Category in Research on Childhood and Literature for Children], Małgorzata Chrobak (2014) notes: "The question about a child's foreignness might raise anxiety. It recalls the antinomy: ours – the other, associations of danger, intolerance, oppression, exclusion from a particular community" (55). Monstrous children were present in culture from its very beginning, even if they were rather neglected or were called otherwise. I believe that there is still a gap in teratological discourse, as, according to my knowledge, there has been no 'positive' analysis of a monstrous child, and monstrous children, in my viewing, are maybe something more than just simply 'scary.' In the following parts of the chapter, I will attempt to show, as in the previous chapters on animals, gender, disability and race, how such a 'positive' depiction of the monstrous child has been exploited by contemporary authors of works for the youngest, presenting the intersectional potential of these readings.

Mythical Animals and Their Children[296]

It might be argued whether children in Greco-Roman mythology were important characters, and if so, for what reasons. A reflection on this issue can be found in Jolanta Sztachelska's (2014) research:

> People in ancient times, convinced of the fragility of life, experienced a high rate of children's mortality and thus did not care for them in particular. [...]
> The Romans, however, show some care for children, The founding myth of the Eternal City is a tale about two boys fed by a she-wolf – they [as Egyptians] do not pay a lot of attention to them either. The concept of the child seems to be something too abstract. They are definitely fascinated by young people; it is visible in classical art, favouring physical beauty and immaculate faces, but true respect is shown towards maturity as it is the quintessence of virtues and merits.
> It is the same with the Greeks who do not favour the child. In their mythology, we will not find any baby gods. If they admire Heracles as a child, it is only to show his strength at an early age and that you cannot become someone great and magnificent if you were not like that in your childhood. An exception would be the story of Eros who did not grow as other children until his mother gave birth to his brother, Anterios, the god of passion. When Eros lived aside his brother, he grew and developed normally and became a slim, beautiful man. When they were apart, he went back to the child form and his mean traits. [...] In every version of the myth, and in its different transformations, he [Eros] undergoes

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[296] Similar titles were used, inter alia, in the following publications: *Animals and Their Children in Victorian Culture*, eds. Brenda Ayres, Sarah E. Maier (2019), *Zwierzęta i ich ludzie* [Animals and Their Humans], eds. Dorota Łagodzka, Anna Barcz (2015).

> a significant degeneration, persistently going back to the form of a chubby and mean child, which undoubtedly is a sign of regression. (36)

If children appeared in classical stories, they were either divine and had special abilities or were imperfect, strange, 'not really human.' Most of those characters were heroes, half-gods abandoned as children, and their stories began when they were young adults. A lot of them were also linked to animals. The first famous child that comes to mind is Heracles, described by Sztachelska, the marvellous son of Zeus, strong since his birth, killing snakes with his bare little hands. Being rather hostile to nonhuman animals in the myths,[297] in the Disney animation Hercules (the Roman name is used in this film) is befriended by Pegasus. In classical mythology, also Zeus was raised when a baby by an animal – Amaltheia, a goat-nurse of the mighty yet not fully-grown god.[298] Small Eros was fed by lionesses and tigers. In the genesis of Rome, it was the she-wolf who fed Romulus and Remus and saved their lives. Nonhuman animals are the reason for the existence of gods and goddesses. Without them, we would have no stories of mythical times at all.

Animals were and still are an inherent part of childhood (Mik, Pokora, Skowera, 2016). In the Enlightenment period, John Locke claimed that children were born with no knowledge (orig. 1690, 1836: 20), and it should be provided by reading them fables, not religious texts (1693: 198). What is more, he even recommended reading children the names of various animals – along with showing them pictures – as soon as they start to talk.[299] He considered the child's development and care for animals as correlated constructs, as humans, according to the philosopher, should respect nonhuman animals from a very young age.[300] As Maciej Skowera (2016) observes: "Somehow, it is the youngest who gain access to the

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[297]   He killed most of them; see Chapter III.

[298]   In the *Beasts of Olympus* series by Lucy Coats Almatheia is more than an animal, as when called 'a goat,' she replies: "'Who are you calling goat, young man?' a creaky bleat came from the shadows. 'My name is Amaltheia, and don't you forget it. I was a nurse to Zeus himself once, you know. Show some respect'" (Coats, 2016b: 80).

[299]   One of the literary recommendations being Aesop's fables. Such a strategy proved to be successful in the 19th century. As Amy Ratelle (2015) claims: "Animals' inability to speak back demanded that humans [...] take on the task on the other species' behalf, an ethical position aided by a literary form in which the reader is implicitly asked to trade places with the animal. This motivation for advocacy became instrumental during the nineteenth century, with the middle-class children educated by animal autobiographies becoming the adults behind the animal rights movement." (22)

[300]   One of the elements that should be eliminated from the human and nonhuman animal relationship would be cruelty. Ewelina Rąbkowska (2020) also reminds us that if the child (according to John Locke) were left alone with an animal, it would certainly hurt it (PhD dissertation). It finds its confirmation, for example, in McMullan's *Say Cheese, Medusa!* (2012), where baby Perseus instantly approaches Cerbie, Hades's dog, and tries to play with him in a way that the dog clearly does not enjoy (62–63).

world of animals, which is often strictly closed from adults" (53). In such a manner, both children and nonhuman animals become mediators between the irrational world of the unknown and the rational, well-known, adult world. Also, a crucial point is made by Owen Hodkinson and Helen Lovatt (2018): "Children are [...] a minority, a subaltern voice, even if many will grow to be members of a privileged elite. There is therefore a strong political argument for extending classical reception to include children's texts and cultures" (5). Even if excluded – or, maybe, because of that – children and other minorities have the means to carry great power, at least in fictional worlds of various cultural texts.

The frequent co-presence of children and animals, appearing side by side in children's literary texts, films, games, etc., also shows how they both are often depicted as subaltern figures (Skowera, 2016: 54). As Amy Ratelle (2015) writes:

> The configuration of childhood as separate from and subordinate to adulthood is much like the distinctions between the human and the animal, predicted on maintaining the illusion of a clear boundary between two constructed states of being. (4)

Both of those constructs, children and nonhuman animals, as rightly stated by Ratelle, are subordinate to adults who have dominated childhood and animal discourses. Animals are also often interpreted, within a childhood discourse, as advocates of the silenced groups, being politically silenced themselves (Meijer, 2016: 56), and that includes children as well. Moreover, many animal characters, for example those from *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* series, can be interpreted as children, as they are clearly female, adolescent girls, sharing the interests of real-life human recipients of the TV-series (see Chapter III). This and many other connections between children and nonhuman animals show the unity between those two constructs that represent the voiceless minorities and the need of the advocacy of adults to express themselves in culture.[301] Maybe this is why animals and children appearing in the products of children's culture very often stand side by side to overcome the hardships of life.

The similarities between children's studies and animal studies have been highlighted by several scholars. As was already mentioned, Kari Weil (2010) underlines the connections between animal studies and the forms of cultural criticism focused on other minorities (1),[302] and, on the other hand, Maciej Skowera (2016) presents the literary parallels between the position of the text animal and the text child, and concludes that in

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[301]   However, this changes for both those groups as they are always 'guided' by adults.
[302]   Such as studies concentrating on gender, ethnicity, psycho-sexual orientation, etc.

children's literature the voice of both – the child and the animal – is at the disposal of an adult who constructs animality and childhood (54).[303] This kind of textual relation and relationship between children and nonhuman animals is to be observed in many works dedicated to young people (Mik, Pokora, Skowera, 2016; Feuerstein, Nolte-Odhiambo, 2017). But only some of them exploit the 'monstrous' potential that lies within dangerous and fascinating creatures, often perceived as uncivilised, wild, untamed. In the following part of the chapter, I will focus on several mythical examples of a relationship between monstrous children and animals who share the bond of subaltern voices.

The Curious Case of the Beast Keeper

The first texts I would like to analyse here would be the already mentioned *Beasts of Olympus* series by Lucy Coats, where Demon, the main protagonist of her books, can be considered a monstrous child for various reasons. To start with, it is crucial to highlight the fact that the childhood of the protagonist that readers observe in the series cannot be classified as a happy one. As was described in previous chapters, Demon was a child forced to work with mythical beasts by his father Pan, a god of nature. Pam had kidnapped his son from Earth and brought him to Olympus. Before that, Demon[304] lived the happy life of an innocent child:

> [...] he'd been an ordinary eleven-year-old boy, living with his mom near an ordinary village in the middle of Arcadia. He spent his days looking after the goats and sheep and chickens, and hoeing the vegetables. Although the fact that he could talk to the animals was out of the ordinary. Coats, 2015a: 7)

The vision of this Arcadian upbringing resembles Rousseau's idea of the innocent child living among the shepherds. What is more, Demon and his mother lived in the middle of Arcadia, which implies that they were the central figures in the land of happy childhood. The boy could talk to animals,[305] recalling the biblical vision of paradise, and as such he was considered to be one of them. The depiction presented by Coats also recalls the idea of a harmonious and blissful life among the shepherds, led by Faun, here, replaced by Demon. The actual Pan from the mythical Arcadia becomes the one that disturbs the peace and ends this innocent childhood, forcing adulthood on his young son. In a way, he is a reversed version of Barrie's *Peter Pan* and the endless childhood, which in Coats' story ends very quickly.

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[303]   Such a thesis would be applicable to other stories as well, e.g. *Pax* by Sara Pennypacker (2016), analysed by Krzysztof Rybak (2018) in the context of classical antiquity.
[304]   His full name is Pandemonius, which also indicates the child's devilish, evil character.
[305]   Which already, according to the narrator, made him odd, maybe even monstrous.

As we read:

> Demon was chatting to the chickens about eggs when his dad arrived. He'd never met his dad before, but he knew it was him all right. His dad had:
> Thick, hairy, goaty legs.
> Big curly horns.
> Yellow eyes with black, slitted pupils.
> No clothes to speak of.
> And a set of silver reed pipes.
> Demon's dad was a god. (2)

This image of Pan clearly corresponds to the popular image of the ancient god. As Pierre Grimal (2008) claims, Pan's story originated in Arcadia. His face was as of an animal, wrinkled, covered in a beard but, essentially, he had the upper body part of a human and lower of a goat (273). On the one hand, he might be considered an ally of shepherds and hunters but, on the other hand, he was often depicted as a violent and cruel creature, having numerous sexual (often – forced) relationships with divine beings – goddesses, nymphs, but also animals (273–274). Later, Christian tradition used the image of Pan to present the Devil who had a human torso, goat legs and horns (Giorgi, 2005: 232). Looking back at those depictions, it is fair, I believe, to claim that the Arcadian life designed by Coats was disrupted in the way it usually is, i.e. by the visit of an evil force, embodying the concept of *Et in Arcadia ego*.

The violent character Pan, maybe inherited from his mythical ancestors, manifests itself at the very beginning of his visits. He says to Demon's mother: "Pandemonius is coming with me, [...] And that's final. You don't want to offend the gods by refusing to let him go, now, do you?" (Coats, 2015a: 6) Those oppressive words are the establishment of power as this is not a request but a demand, accompanied by a threat, aimed at both the child and the woman.[306] After that, "Pan dragged Demon forcibly out the door without more than a quick good-bye kiss and a hug. a weeping Carys [Demon's mother] was left behind them waving a damp hankie." (6) Here, not only a child is abused[307] but also a woman, a mother who has been denied the right to her son. It also must be stressed that Pan is only a voice-depositor of the gods, their manifestation in Arcadia and executor of their will. In this moment, in Arcadia, he has absolute power, as children, women, and animals are excluded in their own home. Coats does not seem to reflect on this complex issue, neither does she explain Demon's

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[306] The concept of gods interfering with family affairs might also correspond to the classic scene of kidnapping and terrorizing the family by them.
[307] Later on, Demon even wonders if he is about to be sacrificed to the gods as he and Pan take the Iris Express to Olympus (Coats, 2015a: 9).

fate.[308] Nevertheless, this is how the story begins – a child is dragged into adulthood, forced to become a responsible caretaker and fulfil his duty to divine authorities who do not care for the child's life. The beginning of the boy's adolescence is violent but also absolutely necessary to fulfil the mythological pattern of the heroic story.

Demon's 'monstrous childhood,' strongly influenced by the trauma caused by his father, is saved only thanks to his numerous relationships with animals and mythical beasts he is called upon to take care of. Most of the adult characters in the books could not care less about children (and mythical beasts). As Demon quickly finds out, he is forced to 'work' in dreadful conditions (Coats, 2015a: 14). Not only the boy's terrible fate is presented here, but also the fate of beasts known from mythology. Evidently, the gods and goddesses present a similar approach to children and animals, as to lesser beings, not worthy of decent living conditions. Both live to serve Olympus where the hierarchy here is very clear. Children, in the mythical world recreated by Coats, are not subjects.[309]

The ability of talking to nonhumans – and that of understanding their speech – might be the only way of sustaining Demon's child status, as that is how he can communicate with other subaltern creatures. What is more, it is also worth noting that before going to Olympus, Demon had also been healing local animals by prescribing them special herbs (Coats, 2015a: 7). Therefore, it might be assumed that the protagonist already had the predispositions for healing any kind of beasts, probably because of being Pan's descendant. That would not only strengthen the relationship with monstrous animals, but also mark the boy as an ultimate guardian of the mythical beasts. Besides those supernatural abilities, Demon also manifests sensitivity and empathy towards nonhumans: in the fourth book of the series, *Dragon Healer* (Coats, 2015d), he wonders: "Why were people so awful to animals?" (10), as if such an approach to the beasts is in fact more 'monstrous' than the monsters themselves.

Certainly, as a demigod, he is not an ordinary child but, according to the mythical laws, a hero.[310] However, the fact that the child is the one to connect with animals must be emphasised. As Pan himself underlines the similarity between mortal and immortal beasts, mythical creatures can serve here as a metaphor for monstrous animals. The world of Coats' mythical fauna is neglected, and the child is the one that has to save it. Demon seems to be in no position to make any kind of decision for

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[308]   That, however, might still change, as the series is not finished yet (2020).
[309]   Not only is Demon treated in such a way. In *Zeus's Eagle* Chiron simply gives a little baby, Hygeia, to Demon, with no explanation, expecting him to take care of it (Coats, 2016b: 14–15).
[310]   Although this classical concept is not explored by Coats, at least not in a traditional way. See Chapter III.

himself, and yet, Pan, violent as he was before, leaves the decision to his son, as he says: "I know how much you love animals, and how they love you back. Of course you have a choice" (Coats, 2015a: 17). One might even start to wonder whether Pan maybe loves his son after all, even if the narrative does not support such a thesis.

It is not clear what kind of 'choice' Pan is talking about. Demon's decision seems to be apparent, but those words might carry another meaning. Humans always have a choice how to treat and perceive animals. The adults, however, here represented by the gods, live in their own world, isolated from the reality and indifferent to the suffering and misery of the subalterns. Such a depiction might find its place in our reality, where young people, among them for example Greta Thunberg,[311] can be the ones to talk sense to the adults, who, being in charge of this world, have been leading to its destruction.

In Coats' series, there are many creatures inspired by classical mythology that live in the Olympian stables. In each book, a new beast (or beasts) is introduced, and in most of those cases it is an excuse for Demon's sometimes questionable adventures. We meet a herd of winged Ethiopian horses, and Demon flies on one of them (Coasts, 2015a: 38); unicorns that Demon had to milk for Aphrodite's annual bath (39); a giant scorpion; Stymphalian Birds, also hurt by Heracles; the Cretan Bull. Most beasts appearing in the series are harmless or at least can be tamed. In antiquity, they were thought to be definitely more frightening, as they often represented the fears and disturbances of the people. Then, in Coats' world the 'scary' side of the monsters had to be transformed elsewhere.

In the story, the real 'monstrosity' seems to be focused around the father figure (Pan) and other adults – the gods and goddesses of Olympus. Divinity in this world is demonized, and power in the hands of adults is portrayed as a tool to harm children and animals. The demon feels this very painfully. At some point of the story, Demon is using very strong words that normally we would not expect to hear from a child (or, more accurately, to read in a book for children):

> "Why do you think he'd [his father would] even be worried about me, anyway?" Demon screamed. "He just dumped me up here and left me. He hasn't been to visit ONCE, even though he promised. I wish I were DEAD. And I soon WILL be. And I don't CARE!" (Coats, 2015a: 100)

One might wonder if the boy's desperate scream is just a moment of weakness or, maybe, it is a very literal expression, the cry for help

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[311] Greta Thunberg is a seventeen-year-old (2020) environmental activist. She is known for her direct and precise talks on climate change and facing the adult rulers of the world, criticising them for their irresponsibility. In 2019, she was *Time's* Person of the Year and was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

of a child who has been kidnapped and forced to work in dreadful and dangerous conditions to please the adults sitting in the divine living room and simply enjoying themselves. Demon often risks his life to protect mythical beasts. For example, he stands up for Pegasus and screams at Bellerophon:

> "I'm not admiring you, and you are NOT taking Pegasus!" Demon said, stepping forward and pushing Bellerophon in the chest. "He needs rest and healing. Go away, you big beast-hurting bully!" (Coats, 2016b: 33)

The 'monstrous' side of Demon can be understood here in two ways: one would concern his relationship with mythical beasts that he finds a common language with literally or figuratively. On the one hand, he is a wild child (Mik, 2020), living among animals, left to himself and the mythical nature of Olympus. One the other hand, Demon's monstrosity is reflected in his attitude towards Pan, his father. It originated from neglect, anger, disappointment, betrayal – emotions that possibly every child experiences at some point in their life. As Demon acts out, he turns into a 'little beast' who expresses his feelings in a direct, sometimes 'monstrous' way. In such moments, he resembles the beasts he is taking care of. They are all angry because they were all neglected by adult humans.

Demon's life is not yet lost. In the world of selfish gods and goddesses, he finds several adult friends who help him get through his adventures and obligations towards mythical beasts – now also saved by the boy. In the fourth book in the series, *Dragon Healer* (Coats, 2015d), the protagonist finds an ally, Chiron, a divine centaur and Zeus' brother. As we read:

> He [Chiron] had a bright chestnut horse's body, but his bearded face and hairy torso were that of a man. He smelled like sweet herbs and wild places, and he had kind deep-blue eyes that looked right into Demon. (112)

Chiron teaches Demon healing techniques that come from nature.[312] It is crucial to stress that, apart from being taught different approaches to healing practices,[313] Demon once again finds a friend not among the Olympian gods but among the outcasts, like Chiron and Hephaestus (see Chapter IV).

Leaving aside the adventures of Demon for a moment, it is worth noting similar types of relationships between monstrous children and animals in a different book for the youngest, for example in Dorota Wieczorek's: *Strachopolis* [Monsteropolis] (2015),[314] a book about monsters and, maybe

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[312]   He shows him how to prepare herbal medicines, etc.
[313]   The issue that might be quite interesting here is the postulate on natural medicine and the treatment preferred to the 'magical box' one.
[314]   English names are taken from the entry by Maciej Skowera (2018: online) in *Our Mythical Survey* on *Strachopolis*.

more accurately, monstrosity. The plot concerns two children, siblings, Kostek and Niezapominajka [Forget-Me-Not], orphaned by the book's most famous fear-fighter (Baltazar Brylski), where 're-socialized,' tamed monsters live alongside humans[315]:

> For a long time now, no one in the city has been surprised by the sight of vampires eating broccoli, werewolves unable to howl or zombies wandering around the streets, whose hands, legs or eyes have to be sewn up every now and then. All these monsters have been rehabilitated, brought to order and adapted to life in a human society. Who are they now? Zombies have long since become skilled workers in the sewing factories of the largest clothing companies. Vampires? Recently, ancient treatments such as bloodletting, which every vampire has gladly used after a vocational training course, have returned to favour. Werewolves? Rumour has it that the mayor himself is one of them.... (18–19)[316]

Fear-fighters fought those monsters who did not re-socialise and join the 'normal' human society. Refugees hid in sewers underneath the city, where Kostek and Niezapominajka ended up, living with and being raised by the creatures who opposed the system. It is worth underlining that among those monsters there were also 'real' animals which had escaped from a zoo/circus (a green panther, a crippled bear), which even more vividly strengthened the connection between the constructs of animality and monstrosity (Slany, 2017a: 13).

Kostek, the main protagonist of the book, certainly might be considered a monstrous child and an intersectional character. When fear-fighters 'save' the children from the sewers, the authorities want to send Kostek to a rehabilitation centre, as supposedly he had become a monster as well (54-55). Also, the rebellious monsters themselves see him as such.[317] One of those characters, speaking of Kostek, describes his situation as follows:

> What a nice, shy boy he is. [...] It is a bad thing that he had to live with monsters. If he had been among people, he could have become a famous athlete, maybe even an Olympic athlete. Or learn the secrets of computer parts and become a popular programmer. Yes, yes... Many things could have been achieved by our Kostek if he had lived like a human being.... (26)

It is not necessarily Kostek's looks that remind the monster of their own kind. It is his upbringing and environment where he spends most of his time, the creatures he talks to, the 'monstrous' experience that he

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[315] Similar concept was developed in Disney movie *Zootopia* (Howard, Moore, 2016), where resocialized predators live alongside their potential victims.
[316] Such a social structure reflects the possible scenario of the Wizarding World, where merepoeple and centaurs could join the wizarding society – but only on the wizards' terms. See Chapters III (merepople) and V (centaurs).
[317] Although not all of the monsters accept him as one of them (Wieczorek, 2015: 37).

gets. Ultimately, just like Hagrid from the *Harry Potter* series, Kostek is an intersectional creature that belongs to both the human and monster worlds, yet could not be fully classified to either one.

As there are many aspects of monstrosity explored by Wieczorek in *Strachopolis*, including problems of categorisation, social structure, ethics of re-socialisation, I would like to only highlight the relationship between the monster child and monster adult, that is between Kostek and Chimeron, the leader of monsters and Kostek's mentor. The latter first appears when the underground monster society is having a heated dispute:

> The atmosphere in the chamber changed in an instant. The monsters dispersed and parted in front of the owner of a low, threatening voice. They retreated to the walls, bowing and dying of humility before Chimeron, a well-known canal ruler who had just returned from his rounds in his underground kingdom.
> He was a chimera, a monster born of other monsters. His face was almost human, covered with barely visible spots like a wild cat, but his torso and paws were that of a lion, his tail of a dragon, his wings came from a bat and his dark, tangled mane... we do not know from whom. (38–39)

Chimeron is the most respected of all the rebellious monsters, the wisest and strongest. He is also very caring, even though he could easily rule the underground with a strong fist. And it is Chimeron who fills the role of a father to Kostek, desperately looking for some male authority. At the end of the book, the boy openly admits that Chimeron was the father that he was looking for all the time and the sewer monsters were his closest family (250). They found their common ground in social exclusion, as the adult humans were the ones who had disappointed them both.

Strachopolis is a book about the spectrum of monstrosity and the perspectives we assemble to decode those constructs, which are in fact relative. Katarzyna Slany (2017a) observes that: "The author rejects the anxiety mechanism that is usually used to create the figure of a monster but uses the postmodern approach to the monster as a human phantom that functions in a modern, arranged space-time continuum" (8). Wieczorek also uses "metaphors of monster figures, taking up the subject of their rejection, as well as of intolerance due to race, origins, gender, or age" (14). The monster might be someone we would not suspect of being one, who hides behind the mask of normality. And the other way around – someone that appears to be a monster might end up being the most decent character in the story. After all, what Wieczorek conveys in her book is that "[m]onsters want to be free, to fulfil their dreams" (173).

Separated from his parents, fulfilling the wish of the gods, Demon from Coats' series is forced to take care of the Olympian stables full of mythological creatures, which occasionally harm him and cause physical pain. It would seem that the theme of mythological monsters

oppressed by the gods (adults) and rescued by Demon (a child) would also indicate a manifesto of a pro-animal kind. Similarly, Kostek finds his family not among 'normal adults'[318] but under the city, in the sewers, among the monsters allegedly threatening the Monsteropolis community. Slany (2017) points out that this motif is very popular among works for children "and always leads to the hybridisation of the child protagonist, who takes over the features and way of life of the beings who raise him or her."[319] Children become monsters, or rather they constitute their status as monstrous children by excluding the parental supervision of adults.

In this union, both sides – the child and the animal-like monsters – seem to find comfort and hope for a change. Skowera (2018), analysing *Strachopolis*, claims that the use of the monsters in Wieczorek's text aims, among others, to "highlight metaphorically the problematic consequences of marginalising minorities". Children here become intersectional characters who are excluded from the society for their age and monstrous upbringing. They cannot make decisions in the adult world because they are too young and too monstrous. Demon from Coats' series is treated like that by the gods as well – for being a child and for taking care of the mythical beasts. As far as the classical traditions are concerned, it seems to be captivating that, once again, the potential readers get to know the myths not only through the main, in most cases, human protagonists, but through animal-like creatures which have been previously neglected or, somehow, decentralised in the 'original' story.

Animal-like monstrosity might stand for multiple kinds of exclusion. The examples presented above underlined the monster character of childhood and growing up, as well as the social exclusion of the child or child-like characters. In the following examples, the animality of monstrous children reflects another aspect of their exclusion – gender, or more accurately, the monstrous queerness of a growing up child.

Queer Monstrosities

The majority of examples presenting gender issues concern male characters. Female monstrous children appear quite rarely in works for young people. One of them would be Medusa in *Brush Your Hair, Medusa!* by Joan Holub (2015; Kulpa et al., 2020: 60-61) from the series of books *Mini Myths*. In this work, written mainly for young children, Medusa is depicted as a crimson and energetic child with thick and tangled hair. When her father tries to comb it, she distracts him by playing tricks and

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[318] In Demon's world, the gods and goddesses.
[319] She recalls the examples of Rudyard Kipling's: *Jungle Book*, Neil Gaiman's: *The Graveyard Book*, etc. 16.

combing her mermaid doll. When she finally agrees to having her hair done, another parental challenge comes up: to persuade her to brush her teeth. It is not known whether it ended successfully.

Although at first glance the plot of the book does not have much in common with mythology, presenting Medusa as an independent and energetic girl seems to be an interesting and rare practice. Her monstrosity is not fully perceived here in a positive manner, but it is no longer a factor that evokes fear. Her 'wild hair' frightens adults who expect exemplary behaviour and neatness from a child. However, her hair becomes a symbol of unbridled childhood energy and freedom, as well as of disagreement with the norms established, among others, in the Victorian era. Medusa is a child and is free, although she suffers a considerable defeat through having hair done.

A similar image of a child-gorgon can be found in Ross Collins' *Medusa Jones*, dedicated to older children. In the beginning we read:

> A long time ago
> In ancient Greece,
> Lived a little girl named
> Medusa Jones.
> Medusa was a gorgon.
> But apart from that,
> Pretty normal. (n.d.)

Medusa turned out to be the descendant of the mythological Gorgon. When she asked her mom – also a gorgon – why she could not turn mean people into stone like her grandma, she replied: "Gran is insane and lives in the cave. Your father and I didn't raise you like that. Anyway, that's not the point, Medusa. You have to work out ways of dealing with people who get on your nerves" (n.d.). Her dad – also a gorgon – agrees with Med's mother and tells his daughter to "rise above it". Here, Medusa is a part of a monstrous family which accepts her, as monstrosity as such is not a factor of exclusion. The only 'monstrous' part of this character would be her being a child growing-up, who still needs to learn about the world surrounding her.

Male child-like mythical monsters appear less frequent as if the monstrosity of little boys was accepted more naturally, as part of their personality, not triggering the need to tame it (see Chapter III). However (and luckily), apart from the binary discussion about gender depictions of a child, at the beginning of the 21st century, more books concerning queerness have been published. One of the examples would be *Sparkle Boy* by Lesléa Newman (2017), in which the main character, a boy called Casey, loves to dress-up as a girl and his sister Jessie learns to understand and accept his choices. Similarly, in *From the Stars in the Sky to the Fish*

in the Sea (2017) the author, Kai Cheng Thom, explores children's fluid gender identification and introduces a child who has not decided yet if they want to be a boy or a girl, a bird or a fish. Those and many other publications show the trend in children's literature to introduce queer topics to the youngest readers in an attempt at taming the monster which is a gender spectrum.

'Queer' in English stands for something strange, peculiar, something that needs to be shown, but also – which may refer to the meanings of the 19ᵗʰ century – something separate, incompatible, or even disgusting (Miriam-Webster, 2019). As Judith Peraino (2005) writes:

> The etymology of "queer" is uncertain. One source suggests its origin in the early English cwer (meaning "crooked, not straight"). Another possible origin is the Indo-European root twerkw, which yielded the Latin torquere (to twist) and the German quer (transverse). The word first appears, however, in early sixteenth-century Scottish sources as an adjectival form of "query," from the Latin quaerere (to seek, to question). The question associate with "queer" became one of sexuality and gender in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries [...], and it was used to describe non-normative sexual behavior in at least one sociological study from 1922. At about the same time, "queer became a term of self-identification within some homosexual subcultures, as well as a term of derision used by the mainstream. (5)

In the 1990s 'queer' became a term for all sexual minorities, rejecting institutional gender categorisation. It also enabled people to highlight the sexual fluidity and point to the instability of sexual identification, or even lack of its necessity (5). As Peraino points out: "Queer theory [...] questions given concepts of identity based on same-sex desire alone, expanding the scope to include intersections of gender and sexuality with race, class, ethnicity, and nationhood" (6). She also describes the construct of fear in terms of the social threat to the binary male/female opposition, constituting normativity:

> [...] "queer" can describe a threat, the sexual ignition of cultural phobias. These phobias, primarily about gender confusion and the displacement of the patriarchal heterosexual family, become anxieties about the integrity of the self, subjectivity, and social identity. Individuals who live openly as gays and lesbians, or who live outside or between the binary male/female, constitute the main queer threat igniting such phobias, and thus are themselves threatened with the greatest material and political consequences. (6)

'Queer,' being something 'strange,' 'abnormal,' to be 'feared of,' is connected, in terms of meaning, not etymology, to the construct of a monster. "Monstro, monstrare," as a verb derived from Latin, meant

"to show, to put on display"; a monster, on the other hand, was a peculiar object of such observation or even a spectacle, a festival of strangeness (see Chapter I). The monsters placed and shown in medieval bestiaries, in which fantastic beasts were supposed to amaze, but also, in a sense, educate, convey universal truths about the world and, due to strong Christian tendencies, warn against sin and misdeeds (see Chapter I). They can be regarded as putting the above-mentioned meanings into practice. The monster, however, was not simply horrifying, at least at the beginning of its existing. 'Queer' was something odd that also in the 21st century evokes fear and might be more frightening than the monsters themselves.

Negative connotations concerning both 'queer' and 'monster' have somewhat erased their original meanings. a monster is very often, though not always rightly, considered to be something that evokes fear or anxiety. As far as 'queer' is concerned, since the beginning of the 20th century, the word has primarily defined all non-normative psychosexual behaviours and/or identities, and although it was already beginning to serve as a form of self-identification within some homosexual (and not only homosexual) subcultures, in some circles it is still used today as a form of offense against the representatives of these subcultures.

In the early 1990s, queer referred to lesbians and gays, thus blurring the boundaries between the straight and the gay, lesbian, bi, and other orientations, but also between cis- and transgenderism etc. In the 2010s, however, queer was probably primarily used to define these orientations and/or identities which are in opposition to the dominant, heterosexual and/or cisgender ones.[320] It could be argued that all those people who are marginalised in relation to heterosexuality imposed by the main discourse are queer. Moreover, it also fills in all the 'gaps' or 'variations' in the defined forms of sexuality, thus emphasising its fluidity and diversity, and its 'non-terminal' character. Queerness is also very often referred to groups whose sexuality and/or identity does not constitute a social, political or economic identity. A queer will be someone who is not like everyone else, which brings the term closer to the cultural construct of the Other, sometimes directly associated with the phenomenon of monstrosity.

Bearing in mind the diversity of the issues at stake, one could argue that both 'queer' and 'monster' contain elements of peculiarity which, in my opinion, are two categories constitutive for these terms. Both can also be regarded as cultural constructs and can be seen as masks or costumes of characters appearing not only in the media, but also in

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[320]   An example is the subtitle of a website: Queer.pl, which states that it has been a portal for LGBT+ people since 1996. There is also a popular program on Netflix: *Queer Eye*, run by five gay men. Its name suggests inclusivity as far as possible and celebrating diversity, in which the use of any gender category is absolutely unnecessary.

various texts, including texts for children. Of course, their functions can be very different, so it is difficult to define them clearly, since queer and monstrosity will always be understood differently in terms of, for example, cultural, political contexts. In literature for the youngest, there are many strategies for talking about monstrosity, although in the context of sexuality it is much less popular and is still taboo. 'Gender' is scary enough for some social groups, not to mention sex-related themes.[321] a monster mask seems superfluous in this case, and constructs of queer and gender are monstrous enough in themselves.

The application of ancient culture, although seemingly distant, may be one of the strategies for showing monstrosity and queerness researched as part of reception studies. In the old days, the concepts of the queer and the monster often went hand in hand, as can be seen in the example given by Liz Gloyn (2018): "[...] in the Roman world, the hermaphrodite was seen as a monster or omen that was thrown into the sea to avoid bad luck" (145). On the one hand, something that was different, that did not fit into 'normal' reality, did not fit into its categories, was horrible and had to be eliminated, as did most disabled children who did not have a chance to survive (see Chapter IV). On the other hand, homosexual love was by no means considered a distortion, and today it is one of the most controversial topics in general public debate. There is no doubt that sex and sexuality, let alone child sexuality, are still difficult subjects for many environments.

Jolanta Sztachelska (2014) writes that the child does not have a cultural gender and is suspended between what is feminine and what is masculine, although at the same time it is not devoid of eroticism. When they grow up, the child's sexuality is formed, including curiosity of the human body, whether its own or that of another human being, and, consequently, erotic fantasy is developed (52). Turning to the monstrous characters known from antiquity, one can notice a certain analogy. The gender of mythological monsters was often not explored. Some of them were simply tools, like Scylla or Minotaur, in the hands of the gods. And even if the gender was defined as male or female, it was probably not oppressive and not dominant in the creation of a given character (see Chapter III). Even if the gender of monsters in mythology was not always distinctive, eroticism and sexuality were vividly present.

Thus, on the one hand, the construction of an ancient monster can be a specific reflection of the lack of a specific gender in a child and helps them to identify with a given character due to its 'non-finite' monstrous form. On the other hand, there are also monsters that are seemingly

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[321]   In Poland's conservative environments 'gender' is considered to be an ideology that threatens traditional values, and sex education supposedly leads to depravation of the youngest and promotes paedophilia.

associated with one gender and have very specific features attributed to it. Such an example would be mermaids (see Chapter III). In Homer's *Odyssey* these creatures (sirens) were supposed to deceive sailors with their beautiful singing and then to devour their victims. In this story, the author does not describe the appearance of sirens. As in fairy-tale narratives, the characters were defined through the functions they had in the narrative. One of them, I think, would be the exposition of antinomy between males and females, the creation of a gender tension between these 'monsters,' as well as the gender polarization of ancient cultural creations: the hero and his mortal, also female, opponents.

In light of these considerations, it seems interesting to 'cast' male characters as mermaids/sirens. Their previous absence is certainly connected with the tradition of looking at women as evil, predatory characters, using men for their own purposes (see Chapter III). Male sirens could therefore break this stereotype and constitute a generic parity of sea monsters. However, due to its fluid sexuality, described by Grażyna Lasoń-Kochańska (2011), for example, the figure of the siren also seems to be a very handy construct to discuss the monstrous queerness of children's characters, as well as the queerness of adult readers.

Both of these constructs – of the monstrous and the queer child – can be found in two picture books, *The Sea Tiger* by Victoria Turnbull (2014) and *Julian is a Mermaid* by Jessica Love (2018). In these texts, the figure of the mermaid is exploited in two slightly different ways. Of course, it is difficult to point out with certainty that these characters were inspired by antiquity – their images certainly consist of a series of depictions present in popular culture, as well as of those originated from folklore or fairy tales. However, I believe that the ancient monstrosity of the sirens, their role of temptresses and characters functioning on the border of two worlds – femininity and animality – was a very important context for the mentioned authors who were certainly very aware of the existence of this mythical thread.

One of the two main characters of Turnbull's picture book, and also the narrator of the story, is the Sea Tiger.[322] Even though he is presented by Turnbull as a 'real' tiger that normally would not live in the sea, he does not seem to have any problems with breathing under water.[323] The Sea Tiger is best friends with Oscar, a child merman. Oscar is depicted as a sensitive boy who loves to daydream and explore beautiful things hidden in the depths of the ocean. The Sea Tiger encourages his friend to go and seek adventures by saying: "... the world is our oyster!" (11),

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[322]   The description and analysis of this book is based on my entry in *Our Mythical Survey* (Mik, 2019a).

[323]   Real tigers are very good swimmers, but they would not survive under water for long.

implying that anything is possible. "Let's explore!," the Sea Tiger says on the next page.

The Sea Tiger and Oscar indeed go exploring wonderful places, observing beautiful underwater plants, animals, seabed formations and the play of lights. They go to the sea circus and carousel, and have a lot of fun. After a long day, they go to sleep right next to each other, and if needed, the Sea Tiger scares away all the monsters bothering Oscar. Their friendship seems perfect, but then the Sea Tiger starts to see a problem while looking at the other mer-children – he is Oscar's only friend.

He knew from the beginning: "Where I lead, Oscar follows" (28–29). It is also his task – as a companion and guide – to encourage Oscar to make new friends. As they swim towards another adventure, they both meet a new pair of friends, a Lion and a merchild. The meeting takes place among a balle of singing turtles which are witnesses to the bonding of the newly met companions: the Sea Tiger, the Sea Lion and the children who take one of the singing turtles with them. Paired with new friends, they go to find new challenges, 'flying' away in underwater hot-air balloons made out of shells, towards new adventures.

The Sea Tiger is the first picture book by Victoria Turnbull. As is the case now in all of her books, it features animal characters that she perceives to be inseparable companions of children growing up. Here, the Sea Tiger might be interpreted as Oscar's imagined friend, as it is impossible for tigers to live underwater. Still, Oscar himself is not a 'real' child, but a merman. Both of the characters are constructed upon a fantasy idea of animals and children. The main issue of the story is how to end a friendship for the sake of each other's happiness. The Sea Tiger, as an older, more experienced friend, makes the decision to separate for both of them, but only when he is sure that Oscar's new friend is really right for him. The picture book shows how to sacrifice something for a friend, even if it requires making a hard decision. It actually symbolises how real friendship should work.

The mythical inspiration for the story is also quite simple. The setting of the marine world invites the presence of underwater creatures, so mermaids and mermen would be one of the potential choices. Here, we are not dealing with ruthless and dangerous sirens, but with their later descendants, beautiful and graceful, fairy-tale-like mermaids. What remained from mythology is the music which is strongly associated with both sirens and mermaids. As was mentioned in the summary, new friendships were born while listening to the turtles' song which surrounded all underwater creatures with its melody. It is almost as if the mythical song of the sea connects not only the ancient times with the present day, but also the concepts of friendship, drawn from antiquity (Marciniak, Olechowska, 2016), which very often were also connected to a great sacrifice.

Julian is a Mermaid by Jessica Love (2018) actually begins before the title page, with a swimming pool on the inside cover, where an older black woman and a little black boy swim. Looking at their clothes and the scene itself, one can assume that the story will be set in a very specific cultural context. We can guess that this context – American 'black' or Latino neighbourhoods – will be a separated, excluded district of the city.

On the title page, we see the main character, Julian, holding a book in his hand, walking down the street with his grandmother whom he calls Nana.[324] Then, three young women characters appear, wearing dresses that, in the boy's view, are like a mermaid's tail. In addition, their hair is coloured and each of them has a different hairstyle. On the wall behind them, we see a shoal of colourful fish.

Julian, Nana and the three women travel by train, passing through the city. When Julian reads a book about sirens/mermaids, he admires the woman sitting next to him; we find out at this point that the boy loves mermaids (5). The following pages show his dream of becoming one of them: he takes off his clothes, unties his hair and dives underwater. Instead of legs, a pink tail appears and Julian swims with other sea animals.

Further on, Julian reveals his dream and his identity to Nana by saying "Nana, I am also a mermaid" (16). When she goes to take a bath, Julian takes off his clothes – this time for real – puts fern and flowers in his hair, puts on some lipstick and uses a curtain to make himself a dress. When Nana first sees him, she does not appear to be happy about the mess Julian has made. However, on the next page, she gives him a gift, a beautiful necklace matching his new outfit. Both looking beautiful, they go out and join other 'mermaids,' i.e. colourfully dressed people walking in a parade through the city. The last pages show Julian and the same elderly woman as on the first page, swimming underwater, but this time, they are all beautiful mermaids.

The theme of the mermaids/sirens serves in this text as a tool for highlighting the concept of Otherness, which is perceived positively. Mermaids are presented here not as vicious creatures wanting to eat human flesh or to use men sexually. They are beautiful and colourful, although different from the people surrounding them. This attracts Julian. He wishes to become a mermaid as he feels he actually is one. The idea of becoming a mermaid points not only to the cultural transformation of the child, but also to the evolution concerning the gender of a developing adolescent. If we go back to the story probably most often associated with mermaids, *The Little Mermaid* by Hans Christian Andersen (1837), this transformation appears to be even more obvious, as the author also sought his own psychosexual identity through this literary fairy-tale.[325]

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[324]   Nana is also the person to whom the book is dedicated.
[325]   Andersen had problems with gender identification, Lasoń-Kochańska, 2011.

Also, the little mermaid is guided by her grandmother who teaches her about the world of humans. The figure of the grandmother guiding her grandchild strengthens the connection between those two texts.

Julian, transformed into a mermaid and not a merman, joins the colourful parade of beautifully strange creatures that actually takes place in reality on Coney Island, the Mermaid Parade. The depiction of the young boy seeking his own identity, cross-dressing, alludes to the concepts of various gender transformations that are very often revealed and celebrated during numerous Pride Parades all over the world. The idea of such a Parade may also be connected to the depiction of the shoal of fish that appeared in the picture book.

The concept of drag or transsexuality concerning members of the Black and the Latino communities might be even more important, as the idea of masculinity among them is quite conservative and its transformations are very often not accepted (see Chapter V). Being black in modern society, unfortunately, might still be a stigma, and may trigger exclusion and discrimination. Being also gay points to some sort of double exclusion, or maybe even triple for also being a child. Love shows how easy it would actually be, if being different was celebrated rather than fought and we all could enjoy and happily accept the presence of various aquatic animals, including mermaids. The mermaid figure in this text is a tool that exposes the positive side of monstrosity. Mermaids are not depicted here as malicious creatures. And this is probably what fascinates Julian the most in his search for his own identity. He wants to become a mermaid because he feels this is who he really is.

There are several elements that link *The Sea Tiger* and *Julian Is a Mermaid*. In both cases, the mermaids, in the biological sense, are men, which in itself is quite unusual. As sirens (then mermaids) were usually women, casting boys in this role is an attempt to break a certain stereotype, which allows us to reflect on the gender roles of both characters. In those texts, we find suggestions that the sirens 'have a problem' with their gender identity. Although in Julian's case the matter seems to be more obvious, in Oscar's it is important that all child characters appearing in the book have actually a very similar appearance, i.e. it is difficult to unequivocally state which mermaid is feminine and which is masculine. We assume that Oscar is a boy by his name, but also his gender is not explicitly stated. His new friendship – maybe with another boy – might imply a homosexual relationship that the Sea Tiger encourages Oscar to develop.

Both Turnbull and Love explore the motif of the carnival. In *The Sea Tiger*, we see a circus and a carousel, in *Julian Is a Mermaid*, there is a parade. On the one hand, it may be a reference to the tradition of a freak show, in which queer monsters were seen as fascinating peculiarities (Bakhtin, orig. 1965, 1984). On the other hand, the carnival overthrows the order and rejects the rules of the 'normal' world, including the rules of sexuality

and sexual orientation. As it turns out, both protagonists feel at home in the world in which there is no order as such. This might be considered a strong suggestion for queer interpretations.

Both texts also feature the figure of an adult authority, the Sea Tiger and Nana, Julian's grandmother. They guide the young characters, help them discover the world and themselves, but also finally accept the mermaids and give them freedom. Those adult characters can therefore serve as role models for parents in the upbringing of an adolescent child seeking their identity. However, just like in the examples of Demon and Kostek, they are not actual parents, as those would maybe, for some reason, be unable to fully understand children or distance themselves from the challenges they face. This relationship between children and members of their family is, however, a topic for a separate analysis.

Victoria Turnbull's and Jessica Love's mermaids are queer monsters who have recently inhabited children's literature. Their protagonists are not monstrous in the 'horrific' sense. In their own way, the authors restored the original meaning of a monster, to their queer, monstrous, child-like characters: the mermaids are fragile, fascinating, but also separated, cognitively non-uniformed. In these picture books, there is certainly huge potential, but these are only two examples of literature for the youngest dealing with queer issues. As Kortenhas and Demarest (1993) claim:

> [...] the trend in children's books is based in the premise that, "boys do, girls are." In picture books, these genderisms are very likely a strong influence affecting children's perceptions of how males and females think, behave, and interact. (221)

Perhaps this trend will intensify but for now, just like the mermaids, a queer revolution remains in the sphere of fantasy. Despite the great changes that have taken place at the beginning of the 21st century, like giving homosexual couples the right to get married in the USA and some other countries, children's culture is still rather closed to the voices of queer monsters who also take part in it. Even though the latest studies show queer topics are getting more popular among works for the youngest (Abate, Kidd, 2011; Pugh, 2011), it is likely that queer monsters will remain the signs of exclusion for a while.

In the next part of the analysis I will refer to more works for children and young adults inspired by classical mythology, where the main characters are disabled children, and still are in a minority as far as the main protagonist is concerned.

Children – Monsters with Disabilities

There are multiple examples of monstrous children in texts for the youngest. However, those related to ancient times are not so frequent. The final presented in this chapter will be linked to the concept already discussed in this book, i.e. disability, but not necessarily connected to the concept of animality as it was the case of the previous examples. Children – according to some – not fully formed, imperfect forms of adults might be considered monstrous, due to both their behaviour and appearance. As was already pointed out in Chapter IV, it is worth recalling that:

> In childhood it is a lack of rationality and with disabled people it is the lack of normal body, behaviour and mind. Instead, it is emphasized [in new approaches], similarly as in childhood studies, that social processes and cultural meaning greatly influence disabled children's and adults' lives and opportunities. (Traustadóttir, et al. 2015: 20).

In *Practical Ethics* (orig. 1979, 2017) Peter Singer claimed that, from the utilitarian point of view, nonhuman animals have the same status as disabled children, and there is no ethical difference between experimenting on mammals and people with mental disabilities. As controversial as this statement is, it certainly shows the potential of unity between children (with or without disability) and animals, both perceived as 'less of a human.'

An exemplification of such a phenomenon – a mythological monster representing a child's disability – would be the main character in *Ancyklopek na placu zabaw* [Ancyclops in a Playground][326] by Piotr Dobry and Łukasz Majewski (2016).[327] The book, dedicated to young children, begins with an ordinary depiction of a parent taking his little child to the playground on a beautiful sunny day. What is unusual for this depiction is the family are cyclops, which automatically excludes the child from other, 'normal' children.[328] Not only does he have only one eye, but he is also bigger than other two-year-olds. Slides are too narrow for him, he is also too heavy for a swing, which makes Ancyklopek unable to enjoy the playground and experience typical child-like activities.

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[326] In the title there is a play on words: in Polish, "ancymonek" means a naughty child; "cyklopek" is a diminutive of the Polish "cyklop" – cyclops.

[327] There are also two other books by those authors published in parallel to this one: *Świat okiem Ancyklopka* [The World Through Ancyklopek's Eye] and *Wszystkie psoty Ancyklopka* [Mischievous Ancyklopek].

[328] In another book from this series, *Świat okiem Ancyklopka* (2016), the authors introduce Ancyclopek to their readers as a child, with mom, dad, and teddy bear. Everything is quite 'normal,' except for it having just one eye. By presenting monstrous child accessories (a baby soother and a rattlesnake for a rattle), Dobry and Majewski show that Ancyklopek does not differ all that much from a 'normal' baby.

Nevertheless, there is a place where Ancyklopek can enjoy himself – a sandbox, where he builds beautiful castles. This motif is strictly connected to the ancient tradition, where cyclops were, besides being monsters, great constructors. Being helpers of Hephaestus and Zeus, they built great walls (Grimal, 2008: 64-65). Dobry and Majewski (2016) highlight this association in the book by writing: "For you must know that the cyclops have a great talent for building" (10). Human children admired the boy for his skills, but only from a distance as they were afraid of the monster because of his unusual size. Interestingly, none of the children makes any kind of hateful comments or make fun of Ancyklopek.[329] The authors clearly show that it is fear that creates the distance between the 'monstrous' and the 'normal,' which is the essence of teratological relationships.

Ancyklopek feels very lonely and sad among his magnificent sand creations. At one point, however, he notices another child who is as lonely as he is. This child is a 'four-eyed monster,' a boy with glasses. Even though we might assume that the reader will distinguish the difference between 'real' and 'unreal' monsters, the authors do not draw any distinct line between the two. Ancyklopek smiles at the boy, and the latter joins the cyclops in the sand box, continuing to play with him. When other children see that Ancyklopek is not dangerous at all, they gradually join the company of sand-castle builders. And, "[s]ince then, Ancyklopek has loved the playground even more and has never felt lonely again." (24)

Ancyklopek na placu zabaw represents the ideological value of intersectionality. It is not the monster who convinces humans that he does not threaten the community, but a cultural hybrid, a liminal being who lives in-between two worlds. Ancyklopek's size might be interpreted as gigantism, and his one-eye feature might be perceived as some kind of optical dysfunction. For the same reason human children might see the boy with the glasses as a queer figure (something odd, unusual), maybe even as monstrous as Ancyklopek himself.[330] For cyclops, however, he is one of his own. This may not necessarily be because of his looks, but because of his loneliness caused by his own 'monstrosity.'

A similar monster is to be encountered in the narrative of Xan Harotin and Fabien Clavel: *Le Monster Plat* (2018), although the main character, Franz, despite also having only one eye, is hardly a cyclops. His monstrosity is defined by his strange looks; he is a 'flat' monster and is socially isolated: he lives with his parents in a cave in the middle of the

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[329]   In Polish illustrated books and picturebooks, it is rare to encounter people of colour. Here, there is a black boy as one of the children presented in the background. That might lead to the assumption that the playground where Ancyklopek plays is a liberal and well-educated community.

[330]   Although having glasses in the 21st century is hardly a stigma.

forest (5).[331] Just like in *Ancyklopek*, Franz's parents are presented at the beginning of the story, but they do not participate in the main events, letting their children face their challenges on their own. Although their occupation is to scare others, Franz is not scary at all, which, for a monster, is a disgrace and raises his parents' concern (8).

Nonetheless, one day Franz is lured out of the cave by the song of a blackbird. The bird is not scared of the flat monster (according to the bird, they are not particularly scary) and convinces Franz that he does not need to be scary in the same way as the bird does not need to be a scared victim (13). As friends, they discover the forest. When Franz expresses his concern that he is afraid of going too far away from home, he also confesses that this is the first time he is out of the cave (which recalls the idea of coming out of the closet, mentioned in the previous subchapter). On the other hand, when the bird reassures him that all he needs to do is to stay on the road (17), this might allude to the Mother's commandment from: *Little Red Riding Hood*.[332]

Along the way, Franz and the bird meet Lars, a round monster, and together they discover a new location, the Oak School, where young forest animals play. While observing them from behind the bushes, Franz recalls a traumatic experience with one of the children: a rabbit once made fun of the flat monster which certainly lowered Franz's self-esteem (30). The way of bringing that back is the music practiced by children. When hearing it, Franz claims that he would be a better musician than a monster, and Lars assures him he will help him with that (35). While trying to take one of the instruments from the class, the animals discover the monster's plans and chase the thieves. On the way, Franz and Lars meet another monster, Paco – with a horn – who is afraid of animals and helps his friends to hide from them (43).

Together, all three monsters and the bird, plan to go back to Franz's cave, to safety and isolation. But there, unexpected guests are already awaiting them – with baskets full of fruit and vegetables. Whereas the bird thinks that they are a peace offering, the animals use the fruit and vegetables as weapons, e.g. a rabbit, who previously bullied Franz, throws a carrot at the monsters. He strikes Franz's teeth, Paco's horn and Lars's stomach. All those body parts make unusual sounds, simultaneously creating music (54–55). Now, as a kind of band, the monsters become part of the group which celebrates the union in front of the cave.

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[331] The place of the monsters' settlement is crucial. Although they live in isolation, their house is also in the middle of the forest, which implies a monstrocentric point of view presented within the narrative.

[332] This fairy tale was often interpreted and retold in the spirit of discovering sexuality, which might connect those two tropes, especially as Franz feels free in the forest, as he never did before (Harotin, Clavel, 2018: 20).

The ending of *Le Monstre Plat* might seem disturbing. While the narrative suggests inclusiveness and leads the reader with the main character towards acceptance, the final stage of the story presents monsters as instruments (literally) of institutionalised oppression. Franz and his friends can become a part of a school community but only when they prove themselves useful and entertaining. This, however, is discovered through an act of violence. They are not accepted as equal to other animals, who dance to the music made by the monsters. Until the end, rabbits and mice seem to be more frightening than flat, round and horned creatures who are subjected to the animals' will.

Both Ancyklopek and Franz are monstrous because of their unusual size and shape. Their disability can be read through body deformations which appear as monstrous to 'normal' characters. Fear of the normalised group is legitimately overcome only in the first case, where Ancyklopek's peers accept them in their small community. In Franz's case, he becomes a part of the entertainment, just like 'freaks' in the 18th- and 19th-century circuses. The monster sustained its monstrosity; what is more, within the narrative, it was reassured by its carnavalisation.

Disability is not always a part of a monstrous child. Sometimes it is assigned by the society identifying the otherness with abnormality, something that is not 'natural' and escapes the order of things. Such a case would be the titled character of Marcin Szczygielski's book, *Leo i czerwony automat* [Leo and the Red Machine] from 2018.[333] In this fantasy novel about the nature of humanity and creation, Leo is a twelve-year old boy living in the City,[334] where everyone is perfectly nice and they all help each other, smile and live a genuinely happy life. What makes the main character special is the fact that he was conceived in-vitro, which only a few people find odd or 'unnatural.' That attitude changes when one day, with no particular reason, the inhabitants of the City become hostile, mistrustful and secretive. They all start to put locks on their doors and alarms in their homes: the City becomes an unconquerable fortress, and some places are closed to Leo now. Also, everybody gets involved in creating a mysterious machine called the Red Machine. Its application is unknown to the main characters. With his friend Anna, Leo follows his father's old paintings and drawings – a symbolic map of the City – to discover the truth behind the machine and, ultimately, to save their hometown.

During the course of the story, the children encounter six mythological characters: Xantos, Aquilo, Balios, Notos, Zephyros, and Euros, whom they later meet in real life. At some point, Leo and Anna also look into

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[333]   The description and analysis of this book is based on my entry in *Our Mythical Survey* (Mik, 2019b).
[334]   Which stands for any contemporary generic city.

Cassandra's eye, which shows possible scenarios for the future and suggests how the Red Machine can affect the world. The children also visit the Cave of the Moirai, where all the data about humans are kept safe. At some point of the story, Leo and Anna hear the story of how different versions of mythology were influenced by people's needs and historical circumstances, and even though some mythological characters are called by different names, they are still the same beings – only in different forms.

As it turns out, the City was once an ancient polis where all the creatures known from mythology lived, and, apparently, still live to this day. Classical mythology and its characters help Leo and Anna destroy the Red Machine and bring harmony back to the City. At the end of the book, they find out that the Prometheus monument is about to be placed on Prometheus Square. It becomes a celebration of antiquity, but also of humanity, which should be appreciated in its diversity and wonderful otherness.

The main theme discussed by Marcin Szczygielski is not otherness in general but, ultimately and particularly, also child monstrosity. Leo, born thanks to the IVF (in vitro fertilisation) method, represents a fairly large group of people discriminated in Poland,[335] treated as 'unnatural children,' 'created' in an unconventional way.[336] His disability is not defined by his inabilities of body or mind; it lies in society's belief that the boy is not really human because of the method by which he was conceived.[337] Leo's monstrosity is visibly expressed at the moment when the main characters wonder who is really different: they or the "cursed people" (150). Leo is the subject of hatred and mockery, not only for other children, but also for adults who are afraid of him. His disability, put on him by others, and monstrosity lie in being different, but only and exclusively for the sake of the way he was 'created.' Another topic of the story is the Red Machine itself which can be perceived as a symbol of hatred 'produced' by the inhabitants of the City. The machine is contrasted with the creativity represented by Leo's father's paintings and the kindness between Leo and Anna, two outcasts and the only hope for the salvation of the world.

Even though antiquity does not seem to be the main subject of the book, it accompanies the characters constantly on their way to solving the mystery of the Red Machine. The centre square of the City and a mall

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[335] However, probably not only in Poland. The main discourse is dominated by the Catholic Church which does not consider this method appropriate. Cf. Kuraś, 2016.

[336] Leo says that some call him "Frankenstein's child" (58); his teacher calls him "different" (120), etc.

[337] This corresponds to some conservative claims as if children born thanks to the IVF method are not really human and lack many human features, not to mention 'a soul,' having been created only by the love of a man and a woman, and supported by God's approval (Bednarczykówna, 2019).

nearby, called "Prometheus" after the mythological titan considered to be the first scientist in human history, already places classical mythology at the centre of the story. This name might allude to a special gift to the people, without which humans would not survive, but also to the high price the hero had to pay for his generosity. Also, it is worth stressing that the subtitle for *Frankestein* (1818) by Mary Shelley is *Modern Prometheus* (cf. Marciniak, 2020: 36), which is another possible connection between antiquity, monstrosity and Szczygielski's book for children. In this way, Leo might be considered both a monster and the next version of Prometheus, who, thanks to his otherness, saves the City from the end of its existence.

More classical characters appear in the story as Leo and Anna discover the old monument to "Xantos Aquilo Balios," a man with two horses (160). Xantos (Xanthus) and Balios (Balius) were two immortal horses, the offspring of Zephyrus, and Achilles's comrades; Aquilo was the Roman name for the god of wind, Boreas. All those characters seem to represent ideas about nature, as well as its guardians. On bas-reliefs the children also notice Zephyrus's image next to the name "'Zephyrus' Insurance Company" (164-165). A few steps further on, they also see the remains of a monument to Euros. All those characters, carrying their own meaning, enrich Szczygielski's book and represent classical antiquity in a postmodern form. Thanks to them, Leo and Anna save the City, which might suggest that classical heritage is not only the historical, but also moral foundation of humanity.

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As the presented examples show, mythical monstrosity can be connected to children and childhood on multiple levels. They can represent the child's wildness, misbehaviour, lack of manners. They can also stand for the child's loss, needs, sorrows, manifested through his or her aggressive behaviour. Monstrosity might be a symbol of sexual and/or gender transition, the child's changing body during adolescence, or confusion accompanying it. Finally, the child's monstrosity often stands for physical deformation and actual disabilities as signs of otherness. All those markers stigmatise the child or child-like characters as excluded beings, people who cannot – or cannot yet – be included in society with full rights. For the said authors, the ancient tradition became a tool to present children's monsters as positive characters who, through their oddity, show that the 'norm' is relative and being monstrous might mean being extraordinary, special, even heroic. The monstrous individuals, supported by classical mythology, might be even considered 'more human' than people presented in a particular work. In the analysed narratives, children become saviours, since adults do not have the ability to be ones.

CONCLUSIONS:
THE MONSTROUS BOOK – TO BE EXPLORED

– Kim zostaniesz, gdy dorośniesz?   – Who will you become when you grow up?
– Dzielnym jeźdźcem będę.   – A brave rider I will be.
Wszystkim koniom   To all the horses
w gęste grzywy   in their thick manes
sto wiatrów zaprzęgę.   I will harness a hundred winds.
Jeździec lekki jest jak piórko.   a rider is as light as a feather.
Koń go słucha każdy.   Every horse listens to him.
Jeździeć konia się nie boi,   a rider has no fear of a horse,
mknie konno pod gwiazdy.   and rides under the stars.
... Że pod gwiazdy nie na koniu?   ... under the stars, not on a horse?
... Że skrzydlatych koni nie ma?   ... there are no winged horses?
Czyś nie słyszał o Pegazie?   Have you never heard of Pegasus?
Mój koń zwie się Pegaz.   My horse is called Pegasus.
    Jadwiga Jałowiec, *Pegaz* [Pegasus], 1977.

After examining monstrous beasts, it might be concluded that **monsters are everywhere**. They can patiently wait under the bed, in the closet, as well as in a deep sea or a thick forest. They may come in great numbers, or alone; visible or hidden from human sight; to build friendships or to destroy their enemies, or simply – to enjoy their freedom. Some of them might not be the loudest, most confident, while others would love to be recognized right away. Finally, we get to observe monsters that are becoming more courageous, they want to fight for their voice and their place in culture. For 'ordinary' creatures those beasts still may seem scary, maybe even strange. It is certain that it is more and more difficult to ignore them. Additionally, monsters seem to come to the point where they do not want to be ignored anymore.

What is more, **monsters are needed**. Even though some of them are thousands of years old, they still serve as representations of contemporary common fears or emotional struggles. Not only do they help in identifying contemporary issues, they also help in overcoming them. As David Schmid (n.d.) points out: "In my ongoing study of the monstrous, I never want to lose sight of the fact that the most distinctive monsters in any culture

are the ones that we don't immediately recognize." The recognition is constant, and whether the monster is reborn from an old myth, or maybe was just created, it always finds its way into popular culture.

Classical mythology and its reception in contemporary culture help to show the path that mythical monsters have taken and what they have already achieved. The iconic monsters, such as Minotaur or Medusa, have almost completely lost their true ancient heritage, as they have become the icons of popular culture and symbols of gender stereotypes.[338] Classical mythology often places a new perspective of the analysed creatures and brings out a new meaning, e.g. monsters' motivations, their backstory, or justification of their actions. However, it must be stressed that contemporary mythical monsters do not always need to be confronted with the ancient texts to be understood.

Reception studies are only one of the possibilities to examine youth culture and track the changes that have been made throughout the centuries. This methodology might be applicable to look at other mythologies as well, e.g. Norse mythology, strongly present in contemporary works for children and young adults.[339] Some of the mythologies often intertwine, as in the *Harry Potter* series, where various traditions meet, as well as in the Marvel or the DC universes. Selecting classical mythology was just one of the possible ways of examining contemporary monsters and observing their transformation that have been taking place for centuries. However, I believe it is essential to point out that this transformation is still happening and will never stop as the cultural mutation is constant and inevitable. Significant changes have already taken place. The signs of exclusion may soon become signs of inclusion.

Occasionally, the culture of children and youngsters is a place where mythical monsters can feel safe. At the turn of the 21st century, a book, a film, a TV-series all have become a door, through which 'freaks' of fantastic worlds enter 'our' reality. Culture for the youngest allows those 'impossible concepts' to exist in the real world, hostile and not adapted for monsters to survive. Children's culture also provides patterns that may serve as examples to adults who are not ready to accept a monster in their everyday lives. Scary as they sometimes are, monsters may become an impulse to look at the starry sky,[340] over which mythical monsters reign,

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[338]   This is not their only function, certainly. In collections of myths for children, for example, they carry various meanings, often related to the classical texts.

[339]   Examples would be: *Odd and the Frost Giants* (2008) by Neil Gaiman; *Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard* series (2015-2017) by Rick Riordan; *Thor* (Marvel comic books and movies).

[340]   In *Stars: Their Facts and Legends* by Florence Armstrong Grondal we read: "Long ago, in the ancient days, the whole sky was divided into sections, or groups of stars, called constellations. These star-groups were given the names of legendary characters, and

not threatened by the 'normality' on earth. They also can encourage us to 'go the distance,' as Hercules from the Disney movie did, and discover the unknown, which was one of the major dreams of the ancient world.

In my book, I have tried to prove that all the marginalised groups I have analysed, i.e. nonhuman animals, men, women, people with disabilities, people of colour and children, might be perceived as excluded. This exclusion is expressed through the figure of a monster, traditionally perceived as a threat to a particular community. The monstrous figures appearing in children's and young adult culture are usually presented in two ways. On the one hand, they are defeated and prove the hero's or heroine's supreme status. On the other hand, monsters are included in the society as formerly neglected, but now accepted individuals. At the beginning of the 21st century, we may observe a tendency of increased monster inclusion, as popular culture seems to respond to the contemporary social issues the world faces.

Nonhuman animals presented as monsters can play the role of antagonists, or rather obstacles standing on the main character's way. They are often eliminated without hesitation, just like Basilisk from *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Rowling, 1998). However, at the beginning of the 21st century, those monsters meet more acceptance from the human characters who try to examine those creatures and understand their behaviour, like magizoologist Newt Scamander. Still excluded, monstrous animals get more attention and understanding from human animals, even if the anthropocentric point of view is sustained within the narrative.

More understanding is also aimed toward gender issues, strongly present in all of the analysed texts. Men and women, often oppressed by sociocultural expectations, become monsters threatening the society. That was the case of Disney's Hercules and Medusa, various Minotaurs appearing in multiple texts, dangerous sirens and mermaids, etc. Their animalistic traits connect them to nonhuman animal monsters and represent the strong bond between two excluded groups, which also highlights the intersectional potential of the analysed characters. In order to be accepted, both the individual and the community have to reject 'monstrous' gender categories and reorganise 'monstrous' structures, adapt them according to the 'monster standards' they have been so afraid of.

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ofthe monsters and wild beasts connected with their adventures. The ancient people wanted their stories to be immortalized in the skies. To know these stories is to know why the star-groups were given these strange and romantic names. Many scientific facts have now been discovered about the stars, for astronomers study them through great telescopes, and from great observations, but these ancient names are still retained" (1940: introduction, no page).

Adaptation is also necessary as far as monsters with disabilities, people with various forms of sickness or deformity are concerned. As it frequently turns out, their only issue is to be accepted by their surroundings. In this case, social adaptation is particularly related to acknowledging the fact that maybe 'disability' is not really a major problem, as those monsters are able to achieve any goal if the society would allow them to do so. That would be the case of Grover Underwood, the main representative of mythical disability in my book. However, in the case of those monsters, not only the way they are presented is problematic, but also their underrepresentation in works for children and young adults. The small number of available examples prevented me from conducting an in-depth analysis. Hopefully, some new texts concerning disability will be created and the research will develop.

The need for marginalized groups' inclusion would also be crucial in the case of 'monsters of colour.' Depending on the particular sociocultural contexts, 'monsters' of other-than-white origin still do not feel safe and welcome in any of the communities of the analysed works, whether it is the fantastic realm of the *Harry Potter* stories or the Half-Blood Camp created by Rick Riordan. The themes of multiculturalism or motifs of inclusion are quite popular in Western Europe and North America, unlike in Poland where such texts are rarely encountered, as 'monsters of colour' still live predominantly in people's imagination. Therefore, their presence is required in both real and fantastic worlds.

Some storyworlds are still not fully open to the idea of 'monsters of colour,' yet they are definitely open to the idea of a monstrous child. Various creatures resembling human children, Demon from *Beasts of Olympus* or Oscar from *The Sea Tiger,* even if still marginalised, attract the reader's attention as unfairly treated monsters that may have been punished by adults without any proper reason. In such texts, children may feel empathy for not only the fantastic monsters that often become their friends, but also for those who actually represent them. Issues presented in the previous chapters: animality, gender, disability, and racism, intertwine in Chapter VI, that represent truly intersectional creatures of culture for children and young adults.

The selected monsters analysed in this book, regardless of whether treated well or badly, certainly can find their place in children's and young adult culture, as I attempted to prove in two articles published while working on this book. In "Mythical Sanctuaries of the Wizarding World: The Ancient Classical Concepts of *Animal Protection* in J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter Universe"(Mik, 2021), I analysed how mythical monsters are 'secured' by Rowling and how those ideas correspond to the classical tradition. Similarly, I had taken a closer look at mythical land in Disney's *Fantasia* (1940) in the article "Et in (Disney) Arcadia Ego: In Search for Hope in the 1940 *Fantasia*" (Mik, 2021, forthcoming), focusing again on

the motif of space. I believe that works created for young people in the mentioned cases provide a safe space for mythical monsters and signs of exclusion. Even though not all books, films, and TV-series present a high standard of inclusion, they have the potential to ignite a discussion on the appropriate way of depicting the excluded groups and how they should be shown, perceived, and treated.

Some of those works might seem inclusive for the rejected minorities, like The Wizarding World of the *Harry Potter* series. However, after taking a closer look at Rowling's books, it turns out that only selected subjects have the privilege to participate in the socio-political life of wizards and witches. Such an approach may also be reflected inter alia in the author's controversial Tweet, where she claims that she accepts all the minorities, besides transgender people (Rowling, 2019).[341] After this Tweet fans flooded the Internet with Tweets and Memes calling Rowling a 'TERF' (trans-exclusionary radical feminist), expressing their disappointment with their then favourite author, the symbol of minorities, a person who had created Hogwarts where a lot of 'monsters' felt safe and at home (Ennis, 2019). It would seem that some authors create their story worlds that are only seemingly inclusive, when after closer analysis, they prove to be as unfriendly as any other.

However, some of the realms of children's and young adult culture are very eager to accept monsters as citizens. The example would be the universe of *My Little Pony*, inhabited by various beasts. Similarly, *Monster High* franchise celebrates monstrosity in all its varieties, expressing the creators' love for diversity and beautiful weirdness. Many works presented in this book show that the position of a monster in popular culture is changing and that the contemporary 'freaks' are still going through various metamorphoses. Having stated that, it might be claimed that the researchers of teratology will always have the possibility to analyse new works, including those aimed at young people.

As the last part of the book presented, teratology might not necessarily be related to fantastic monsters. The figure of dangerous creatures accompany our everyday lives, and it is crucial to recognise such narratives relatively quickly. Monsters might be positive characters, but the depictions of them may also be misleading. Hence, when approaching an unidentified creature one should remember they might prove just as dangerous as we are.

In the introduction to the book, I asserted that teratology would be learning a new language. The analyses presented in this work might

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[341]   Tweet from 19.12.2019: "Dress however you please. Call yourself whatever you like. Sleep with any consenting adult who'll have you. Live your best life in peace and security. But force women out of their jobs for stating that sex is real? #IStandWithMaya #ThisIsNotADrill."

be considered an introduction to a monstrous course, during which only the basics are presented. Learning teratology continues, as there are many perspectives of monstrosity still to be examined, e.g. age studies ('monstrous age'), themes of war ('monstrous invader'), migration ('monstrous immigrant'), economic disparities ('monstrous poverty'), etc. The climate crisis could be a teratological topic as well: such a motif is explored, among others, by China Miévielle in *Un Lun Dun* (2007), where the monster is a smog. There is no one ultimate approach to teratology. Each and every monster has its own origins, story, and environment it exists in. My book does not summarise the history of the monster but rather points to its common feature – exclusion. It might be considered only one of the letters of the teratological alphabet, as there are a variety of others to explore.

One of the possibilities of applying teratological research would be place studies. Jorge Luis Borges in *The Book of Imaginary Beings* (orig. 1967, 2002) writes:

> The idea of a house built so that people could become lost in it is perhaps more unusual than that of a man with a bull's head, but both ideas go well together and the image of the labyrinth fits with the image of the Minotaur. It is equally fitting that in the centre of a monstrous house there be a monstrous inhabitant. (100)

The ideas of monsters and monstrous settlements are closely connected. Examples of such relationships can be found in children's and young adult culture as well. One of them would be: *Monster House* (dir. Kenan, 2006), an animation where the titled 'character' became monstrous after its inhabitant, being monstrous as well, died on its grounds. Similarly, a monstrous house would be the Burrow, the magical home of the Weasleys from the Harry Potter story-world. Despite its 'monstrous' look: crooked chimneys, randomly added rooms, chaotic arrangements, Harry loved it, as it was the best house he had ever been in (Rowling, 1998: 36). Such depictions reflect the contemporary thought on monstrosity and its inclusive aspect of presenting monstrous characters in a positive light.

Another example of monstrous houses comes from Polish literature for children. *Dom nie z tej ziemi* [A House Out of This World] (2017) by Małgorzata Strękowska-Zaremba is a story in which the house is monstrous as well, and again because of its inhabitants and domestic violence aimed towards the children. What is more, coming from the same author, we have *Lilana* (2019), a fairy-tale like village that influences the main characters with its monstrous beauty and leads them towards self-destruction. Studying monstrous places and their inhabitants has a lot of potential to discover new sociocultural patterns and borders of exclusions that reflect real-life issues.

Social exclusion, which is the main theme of this book, is still with us, as there are rarely cases of including a monster into a community that is other than monstrous. Such a claim might already suggest the solution for the marginalisation of minorities: not to try to make monsters 'normal,' but to become a monster oneself; to accept animals as fantastic beasts, with their right to be wild; let women and girls be witches, men and boys – sirens, people with disabilities – mythical creatures capable of doing anything, people of colour – free in their diversity. Similarly, children, little monsters, to whom the analysed texts are most often addressed, can embrace their wildness and join the teratological parade of creatures inspired by classical mythology. Thanks to the developing children's culture, this monstrous show becomes greater and the mythical sanctuaries are expanding their area of influence. I believe that my work opens up research perspectives, leading, among other things, to answers to the question of the presence of monsters in other than Western cultures, the impact on their image, involving contemporary religions, mystical practices, and beliefs. This type of research requires continual verification, as the cultural reality is not constant either. Transformation continues, and it is up to future teratology scholars to decide whether this area of research will expand as a monstrous book of monsters, which is the constantly growing world around us.

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This book explores how mythical monsters, present in children's and young adult culture, become perceived as symbols for various groups that communities tend to exclude because of their lack of conformity. It also questions whether the excluded characters, once symbolically re-created as monsters, are more likely to emancipate and gain a voice or feel condemned to isolation, aware that a society, where 'normality' in its broadest sense is highly valued, would deny them a true integration. A thorough analysis of constructs of exclusion in children's and young adults' culture (literature, films, and TV-series) presented in the consecutive chapters of the book demonstrate how classical mythology and its 'monsters' emphasize and clarify the phenomenon of exclusion and its related concepts.

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