

the heart of the entire book and is also the main point of the author's concluding remarks. While adults are trying to create their own literary and cultural space for young people in the face of profound cultural and technological change, children's literature continues to register and, to some extent, drive cultural change. It can offer insights into new ways of being human, and new developments promise to unsettle the established contours of the discipline. Finally, Carrie Hintz points out that children's literature scholars must view the works they study in the context of broader cultural concerns, with the study of children's books becoming all the more urgent and rewarding for that fact.

This is a refreshing and accessible but well-thought-out summary of the historical and cultural aspects of children's literature studies which also offers information on new developments in this dynamic field with its rapidly changing landscape of narratives, motifs, themes, characters, values, and evaluations, which makes it an invaluable resource for anyone studying children's literature, especially students of literature and educational studies.

Mythical Beasts and Children's Literature

Katarzyna Marciniak, ed. 2020. *Chasing Mythical Beasts: The Reception of Ancient Monsters in Children's and Young Adults' Culture*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter GmbH. 646 pp. ISBN 978-3-8254-6995-8.

Marija Paljuši, Nikola Novaković

As Katarzyna Marciniak, the editor of *Chasing Mythical Beasts*, states in the introduction of this collection of essays on mythical beasts, the creatures from mythology are present even nowadays and are found “in books and Hollywood blockbusters, in the childhood tales told by our family members and in the Internet” (28). Considering the relevance of mythical beasts, the authors of this volume wanted to examine “the reception of the mythical creatures in the evolving youth culture” (38), and they did so by analysing not only literary works “but also other spheres of human artistic activity, mainly movies, TV-series, and comics” (39). The volume is divided into five parts and gives a wide range of examples of the reception of mythical creatures in children's and young adults' cultures.

Sheila Murnaghan and Deborah H. Roberts' two essays serve as the introductory chapters to the first part of the volume, dedicated entirely to the Minotaur who is known as “the most famous monster of Greek mythology” (41). In the first essay, they analyse Nathaniel Hawthorne's books of mythology and his depiction of the “relationship between literal myth and the figuration of a spiritual condition” (59), as Hawthorne paints the Minotaur as having two sides, human and animal, which shows the author's empathy concerning the monster. This complexity of the Minotaur's dual nature is further analysed in the second essay by Murnaghan and Roberts, which examines the duality in terms of illustrations in collections of mythology for children. Whereas some illustrators reduce or remove the Minotaur's monstrosity by focusing on his animal part, others focus on his humanity, which serves “as an allegory for both human corruption and for the misery it brings the corrupt” (91). Other chapters in this section investigate the Minotaur and male identity formation in British young adult fiction (Liz Gloyd); mythological hybrid creatures in Ovid's metamorphoses

and postmodern fantasy (Markus Janka and Michael Stierstorfer); mythological beasts in modern Greek children's literature (Przemysław Kordos); and the Minotaur in the mixed-media text *Requiem for a Beast: A Work for Image, Word and Music* by Matt Ottley (2007) (Elizabeth Hale).

The opening chapters of the second part of the volume are about the Minotaur's "strong competitor" (41) for the place of the most popular mythical creature – Medusa. Several authors of the chapters use the Gorgon myth from a feminist perspective. Susan Deacy explores Richard Woff's *Bright-Eyed Athena in the Stories of Ancient Greece* (1999), monstrosity, and the enculturation of girls. Owen Hodkinson, the author of the second chapter of this section, "'She's not deadly. She's beautiful': Reclaiming Medusa for Millennial Tween and Teen Girls?", claims that Medusa is "the ideal figure to encourage young girls and young readers generally" to learn how to live with being different and how to discover their self-worth (203). The remaining chapters of the second section focus on other mythical beings, such as sirens (Weronika Kostecka and Maciej Skowera; Katarzyna Jerzak) or Erinyes (Babette Puetz), and analyse the way the mythical material was transformed into stories for younger readers.

Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer's opening chapter of the third part of the volume explores J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* and his connection to the Greek god Pan. Kümmerling-Meibauer claims that "the Peter Pan figure in Barrie's novel reveals a complexity" (297) that is reached with the combining of many different species. However, Peter Pan does not entirely fit into either of the species. He is rather "at the threshold between the real and the imaginative realms" (296). Edith Hall's chapter analyses "the function of centaurs in some bestselling modern literature for young people" (301), while Elena Ermolaeva focuses on centaurs in Russian fairy tales. Karoline Thaidigsmann's chapter investigates the function of mythical beasts "in communicating with a dual readership in times of governmental censorship" in communist Poland (339). The motif of Pegasus, as well as talking horses and unicorns, is discussed in Simon Burton's analysis of C.S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*, which combines mythology and the Christian tradition.

The fourth section of the volume focuses on the concept of monstrosity itself, with wide-ranging essays in both geographical and thematic terms. Marilyn E. Burton examines human monstrosity in N.D. Wilson's *Ashtown Burials* series. Daniel A. Nkemleke and Divine Che Neba follow the cultural and histo-geographical trail of mythical creatures in the oral tradition of Cameroon. Jerzy Axer and Jan Kieniewicz's chapter is a "report on the experience of our encounters with the mythical creature from East Africa known as the *wobo*" which starts from a novel for young readers by Henryk Sienkiewicz and progresses to a search for the source of the myth in East African mythology. Małgorzata Borowska traces the motif of the "big fish" from Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio* across the various literary, historical, and cultural intertextual links established in Collodi's text. Adam Łukaszewicz's chapter introduces two Egyptian tales and their fabulous creatures while presenting their possible parallels in later texts, such as those by Homer and Jules Verne. Robert A. Sucharski explores the figure of the Wawel Dragon from the novels of Stanisław Pagaczewski. Finally, Helen Lovatt seeks to understand the Greek heritage of the fantastic beasts in the Harry Potter series.

The fifth part of the volume shifts the focus to the reception of mythical creatures in works rich in images, such as comic books, animated movies, and television programmes like *Doctor Who*. Elżbieta Olechowska identifies the use of classical mythology in the comic books of Joann Sfar and Christophe Blain, especially their use of hybrid creatures. Hanna Paulouskaya examines how Greek myths were adopted for Soviet animated movies in the 1970s. Amanda Potter discusses the portrayal of classical monsters in the BBC series *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, *Atlantis*, and *Doctor Who*. Konrad Dominas extends investigations of mythical creatures to the Internet, showing “the reception of mythical creatures in the context of multimedia and interactive materials for children on the Internet” (540). In the closing chapter, Katarzyna Marciniak points to the intriguing link between mythological creatures and the Muppets.

As evident from this brief overview of *Chasing Mythical Beasts: The Reception of Ancient Monsters in Children’s and Young Adults’ Culture*, the volume succeeds in its aim of investigating “the reception of the mythical creatures in the evolving youth culture” (38) while including studies of not only literary works but also movies, TV series, comic books, and other forms. The authors included in this collection of essays successfully prove that “the all-ages culture that flourishes in our times is particularly accommodating for the mythical creatures” (38): instead of languishing in the past, forgotten and unused, mythical beasts continue their fictional lives in contemporary texts that reflect the vibrant and enduring legacy of antiquity.

New Ideologies and Young Adult Fiction

Deborah Lindsay Williams. 2023. *The Necessity of Young Adult Fiction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 160 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-284897-0.

Nikola Novaković, Damjana Kolednjak

As Deborah Lindsay Williams points out in the introduction to her book, children’s literature is often seen as peripheral, “not as important as literature written for grown-ups” (1) despite its increasingly strong representation in academia as a focus of scholarship. The introduction also introduces the problem of defining not only young adult literature as a category of study determined by its content, but also the audience for this category, since, as the author stresses, YA books attract both teenagers and adult readers. However, the author focuses much more on the specific nature of young readers, and in particular their potential for what she terms a “cosmopolitan reading practice, which necessitates a willingness to engage, to move away from what is comfortable or familiar” and to conceive of “difference as an opportunity rather than a threat” (5). Williams views YA fiction as intended for a “readership of potential citizens” (6) who may embrace what she calls “cosmopolitan” practices and therefore reject ideas of fundamentalism, binary thinking, and cultural purity, which represent a reaction to an encounter with difference that Williams claims is embodied by the novels she selects for discussion. These speculative YA novels (all by female authors) are therefore chosen because they address what Williams terms “some of the most pressing issues of the past quarter-century: xenophobia, racism, nationalism, and the climate crisis”