

Gisela Baños , Victor Sabaté

Mythological Monsters [Monstruos Mitológicos]

Spain (2019)

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Gisela Baños (Author)

Gisela Baños is a theoretical physicist educated at the Universität Leipzig, Germany, an editorial proofreader and an author of science fiction. She has been a finalist in a number of literary awards in the category of short fiction. She describes herself as someone who has a "curious nature" and has enjoyed a lifelong love of classical and Greco-Roman mythology (Baños 2021, personal communication). Previously, Gisela has contributed to compilations of mythology including *Mis Pequeños Héroes*, *Mujeres Extraordinarias y Mitología para Niños*, and has published a book on Norse mythology called *Las aventuras de Thor*.

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Victor Sabaté (Author)

Victor Sabaté was born in Barcelona in 1976. He speaks Spanish and Catalan. He obtained his Bachelor's degree in Political Science and then completed postgraduate studies in Creative Writing and Translation. He wrote the novel *El joven Nathaniel Hawthorne*, which was published in Catalan by Rayo Verde in 2012. Since then, he has published a book of short stories, and books for children. A number of these were published under a pseudonym and in collaboration with other authors in Spanish and Catalan.

Since 2015, he has been a PhD student at the Universitat de Barcelona, Departament de Filologia Clàssica, Romànica i Semítica in Barcelona, Spain. He has published academic papers and books on classical mythology and figures.

Sources:

Author's [profile](#) on Academia (accessed: February 15, 2021).

Author's [profile](#) on Shackleton Books (accessed: February 25, 2021).

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Additional information

Summary

Monstruos Mitológicos is an engaging exploration of the mythological creatures of the classical world. The illustrated chapter book selects fourteen monsters and beasts from ancient Greece; these include the ghastly and terrifying and the incredible and awe-inspiring. Included in the selection are the Minotaur ("Minotauro"), Medusa, the Sphinx ("la Esfinge"), mermaids ("las sirenas"), Chimera ("Quimera"), and the Harpies ("las arpías").

The book's format is easy to read and well structured. For each classical monster, the authors have created a character profile. This profile provides the reader with essential information about the monster, including their main traits, profession, food preferences and history. Each creature is profiled and graded according to four qualities: strength ("fuerza"), beauty ("belleza"); intelligence ("inteligencia") and "voracity" ("voracidad"). In Spanish, "voracidad" refers to the state or condition of being voracious. It is often used to describe a person or animal that is experiencing extreme hunger or the urge to eat. Character profiles not only help the reader gain an understanding of the monster's personality but also how they differ. Links to places in the ancient Greek landscape are also highlighted. A short summary of each monster as represented in the book is outlined below.

The Minotaur

Part bull, part human, the Minotaur ("El Minotauro") is described as an enormous, fierce and unattractive creature, which preferred to eat "chicken, elephant milk and human flesh" (pp. 4–5). The authors grade the monster in the following way: 80% for strength, 90% for voracity, 20% for beauty, and 40% for intelligence. The monster's "profession" is defined as being a "resident of the labyrinth". Each year, the people of Athens gave 14 children to the Minotaur until Theseus, the prince of Athens, entered his labyrinth and killed him.

The Lion of Nemea

The Lion of Nemea ("El León de Nemea") is represented as a gigantic and ghastly monster with a lion's head and body and with almost impenetrable skin (pp. 6–7). In the illustrations, he is represented as blue in colour and fierce, with his sharp claws splayed. The authors rank the monster in the following way: 80% for strength, 90 % for

voracity, 50% for intelligence, and 60% for beauty at. His "job" was "to terrorise the citizens of Nemea". Meanwhile, his preferred food was "raw meat". The authors summarise how Hercules defeats the monster by choking it.

Polyphemus

The authors describe Polyphemus ("Polifemo"), a giant one-eyed Cyclops, as a "cruel" monster, which preferred to eat "raw meat", including "tender human flesh" (pp. 8-9). He is graded in the following way: 70% for strength; 90% for voracity; 10% for beauty, and 20% for intelligence. Herding sheep and goats was his profession. The authors summarise how Ulysses defeated the monster in Homer's epic poem, *The Odyssey*.

Medusa

Born from two aquatic monsters, Medusa was a gorgon with snakes as hair. Her profession is described as turning "people into stone" (pp. 10-11). The authors give her the following grades: 50% for strength, 90% for voracity, 20% for beauty, and 70% for intelligence. The authors recount how Perseus defeated Medusa. He was commanded to take her head by King Polydectes.

The Hydra of Lerna

The Hydra ("La Hidra de Lerna") was a water monster with 100 heads and "toxic and stinky breath" that occupied the murky lake of Lerna, Greece (pp. 12-13). The authors describe that its preferred food was Lerna's "livestock", peppered with spices and garlic. They grade the monster in the following way: 70% for strength; 20% for beauty; 80% for voracity, and, 40% for intelligence. The authors also summarise how Hercules defeated Hydra, with the help of his nephew, Iolaus.

The Sirens

The Sirens ("Las Sirenas") were beautiful but dangerous creatures of the classical world. They lured sailors into water with their bewitching songs. Immobilised, the sailor often drowned. The authors highlight that while sirens are commonly portrayed as "women" with fish-like tails (also known as mermaids) in modern popular culture, in Ancient Greece, they were perceived as women with avian wings (pp. 14-15). Against the four qualities, the authors give them the following grades:

30% for strength, 100% for beauty, 90% for voracity, and 80% for intelligence. The authors summarise Ulysses' encounter with the Sirens on their island, as recited in Homer's *The Odyssey*. He outwitted them by asking his crew mates to tie him up. They also blocked their ears so that they cannot hear the Sirens' song.

Cerberus

Cerberus ("Cerbero") was an enormous creature that guarded of the underworld, the place where the souls of people went after death (pp. 16–17). Hades reigned over this realm. Cerberus was a dog with three large heads, three small snakes' heads and a dragon's tail. The monster preferred to eat "honey cakes". The authors rank the monster in the following way: 80% for strength, 20% for beauty, 60% for voracity, and 30% for intelligence. The authors outline how Orfeo, who was a "normal boy", descended into the underworld to find his lover who had died. He used music to defeat the Cerbero, transforming him into a puppy ("cachorito").

The Graee

The sisters of Medusa called Enyo ("Enio"), Pemphredo ("Pefredo"), and Deino ("Dino") are described as Graee ("grayas") "who were born old" and share an eye and tooth (pp. 18–19). The profession of the hag-like monsters was to guard the pass to Gorgonas. The authors give the following grades: 5% for strength, 10% for beauty, 40% for voracity, and 50% for intelligence. The authors recount briefly how Perseus defeated them by taking their eye and tooth.

Python of Delphi

The python of the great oracle of Delphi ("La Pitón de Delfos") is described as a monster that polluted water and destroyed crops by "releasing vapours", which also caused prophetic visions (pp. 20–21). The monster is ranked in the following way: 70% for strength, 20% for beauty, 80% for voracity, and 50% for intelligence. The authors summarise how Python was the defeated by Apollo.

Chimera

Part lion and part goat, Chimera ("Quimera") was a fire-breathing monster from Asia Minor (pp. 22–23). Its profession is defined as a "looter of territories". Meanwhile, its preferred food is described as

"barbecued slices". The authors grade the monster in the following way: 90% for strength, 10% for beauty, 80% for voracity, and 50% for intelligence. The authors summarise how Bellerophon defeated the monster.

The Harpy Sisters

The four harpy sisters ("Las arpías") named Aello, Ocypete, Celaeno, and Podarge ("Ael", "Ocipete", "Celeno," and "Podarge") (pp. 24–25). Notably, the authors highlight the meanings of their names associated with wind and meteorological phenomena. Aello means "storm", Ocypete, to "fly rapidly", Celeno, "dark," and Podarge, "swift feet". They are described as possessing an insatiable hunger ("un hambre voraz", authors' emphasis) and stole food from houses. They are graded in the following way: 60% for strength; 10% for beauty; 100% for voracity, and 40% for intelligence.

The Giants

The Giants ("Los gigantes") are described as monsters with the head and strong upper bodies of men with serpent legs. The potions prepared by their mother are described as their preferred food (pp. 26–27). The authors grade the monster in the following way: 100% for strength, 10% for beauty, 40% for voracity, and 30% for intelligence. The authors summarise their battles called Gigantomachy with Zeus and Hercules.

The Sphinx

The guardian of the Theban walls, the Sphinx ("La esfinge") is described as a fierce, voracious and very clever monster with a lion's body and a woman's head (pp. 28–29). Her food of choice was "Thebans and foreigners". The authors grade the monster in the following way: 60% for strength, 30% for beauty, 80% for voracity, and 90% for intelligence. The authors also refer to the Egyptian Sphinx, renown for asking riddles and making rhymes.

Scylla and Charybdis

Finally, Scylla and Charybdis ("Escila y Caribdis") are monsters that inhabited the strait of Messina (pp. 30–31). They "fed" on sailors and destroyed ships. Escilia is described as a stone in the form of woman with six dog heads. Meanwhile, Caribdis is a whirlpool. They are given

the following grades: 90% for strength; 10% for beauty; 80% for voracity, and, 50% for intelligence. The authors reprise how Ulysses' escaped from the monsters, as recited in Homer's *The Odyssey*.

Analysis

Monstruos Mitológicos introduces young readers to the monsters of the classical world. The monster is an ancient archetype traditionally associated with the concept of evil. This archetype has been traditionally portrayed as an ugly, fierce and imaginary creature. Often a hybrid figure, it embodies human and non-human traits. Throughout history, portrayals of monsters have changed considerably. In the 21st century, the monster is often depicted with over exaggerated features, bright colours and is often linked to happy endings.* However, classical representations are truly "Monsters of Reality". This type of monster incites fear, ignites the imagination, and can help people reflect about the nature of cruelty and evil in the human world as well as the uncertainties of life.** In light of the differences between classical and contemporary notions of the monster, it can be challenging for contemporary authors and illustrators to reimagine classical texts for a modern audience. Notably, when developing *Monstruos Mitológicos*, Baños highlighted that she attempted to be "faithful" to the texts, while also working within the set perimeters of the adapted text (Baños, personal communication, March 2021). She added that that classical works include "controversial topics", which she felt "were not suitable" for children [... y existen temas controvertidos que no creo que fueran adecuados para niños de la edad a la que va dirigida el libro] (Baños, personal communication, March 2021). The authors negotiate these challenges by focusing on universal themes and experiences, and making the monsters more relatable to the modern reader. For instance, they represented as creatures that have "professions" and favourite foods.

Sabaté and Baños do not explicitly define the nature of the monster; however, their ideas are reflected in the character's profile and visual representations. Through comparative analysis, the authors have constructed a character profile that includes an evaluation table. According to their analysis, the monster possesses four essential qualities: strength ("fuerza"), beauty ("belleza"); intelligence ("inteligencia"), and voracity ("voracidad"). These qualities become the values or the criteria of the evaluation table. The evaluation table of the book encourages the reader to compare and contrast all the

monsters and even rank them. This structure may represent the influence of modern gaming. Notably, children's role-play, literature and gaming are intimately connected (Martin 2018).*** For example, *Dungeons and Dragons*, a popular digital game, was influenced by the fantasy book, Snyder's *The Egypt Game* (1967). Similarly to *Monstruos Mitológicos*, in *Dungeon and Dragons* each competitor is ranked by its abilities and power.

Following the authors' assessment, evil is associated with the ability to take human life or livestock, which was a primary source of abundance in the classical world. This capacity is primarily linked with a creature's voracity. For example, in the selected group of monsters, the most voracious are the harpies, who torture human souls and carry them to the underworld (p. 25). The Minotaur, mermaids, Medusa, Polyphemus, the Lion of Nemea closely rank second. It is important to highlight that the voracious are not necessarily hideous. Sirens, for example, possess an insatiable appetite but also are very beautiful, intelligent and seductive (p. 14). Notably, the relationship between evil and voracity continues to be represented in modern popular culture. For example, the Dementors, wraith-like and dark monsters, from J.K. Rowling's "Harry Potter" series feed on happiness.

Importantly, the authors highlight to the reader that evil can be vanquished. They recount the stories of classical heroes, who demonstrated perseverance, courage, and cleverness when battling these monsters.

The book's illustrations, which are digitally produced, play a critical supporting role to the text, helping the reader to visualise the traits of monsters and places of the ancient Greek landscape. When developing the characters, the authors drew on a range of resources, including *El Diccionario de mitología griega y romana*, by Pierre Grimal, which is a definitive survey of the Greek and Roman mythology (Baños, March 2021, personal communication). Notably, Peekaboo Animations has selected a colour palette that abides by general modern guidelines and trends: it is bright and colourful. The bright palette is stimulating and helps the young reader to make associations with their real world. Importantly, the darker traits of the characters are also portrayed. Key physical features, such as eyes and claw-like hands, play a central role in conveying the menacing and fear-inciting nature of some creatures; for example, the eyes of the Harpy are narrow and a fluorescent yellow, which accentuate the spirit's demonic nature.

Monstruos Mitológicos affords modern readers the opportunity to explore the concept of evil and cruelty in ancient Greece in a thought-provoking and engaging way.

* Lauren Christie, "The evolution of monsters in children's literature", *Palgrave Communications* 6 (2020): 2.

** Ibidem.

*** Martin, Cathlena, "Role playing in children's literature: Zilpha Keatley Snyder and the 'Egypt Game'", *American Journal of Play* 10.2 (2018): 208-228.

Classical, Mythological,
Traditional Motifs,
Characters, and
Concepts

[Charybdis](#) [Greek Religion](#) [Homer](#) [Minotaur](#) [Odyssey](#) [Polyphemus](#) [Scylla](#)
[Sirens](#)

Other Motifs, Figures,
and Concepts Relevant
for Children and Youth
Culture

[Coming of age](#) [Good vs evil](#) [Humanity](#) [Individuality](#) [Intellect](#) [Knowledge](#)
[Love](#) [Religious beliefs](#) [Science](#) [Students](#) [Subjectivity](#) [Teachers](#) [Utopia](#)
[and dystopia](#)

Further Reading

Lauren Christie, "The evolution of monsters in children's literature", *Palgrave Communications* 6 (2020): 2-7.

Martin, Cathlena, "Role playing in children's literature: Zilpha Keatley Snyder and the 'Egypt Game'", *American Journal of Play* 10.2 (2018): 208-228.
