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<http://www.theworldofmichaelparkes.com/cm/Home.html> (access: 2017-06-08).

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Why Centaurs Do Not Rape Anymore?

Looking for Sexuality in Contemporary Children's and Young Adult Culture Inspired by Classical Antiquity

Introduction

In Greek and Roman mythology, centaurs (ketnauroi) were described as wild and brutal creatures: half-men, half-horses. They ate raw meat and their customs were unusually wild: they were famous for raping women and drinking, almost every single one of them was considered a savage creature that was a threat 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. They could also foresee the future and read the stars.

These definitely complicated creatures often appear in children's culture – books, movies, games, etc. This poster presents examples of how they were depicted in the works for young audiences: their main character trait is certainly not rape and violence.

Happy Centaur Family

Winsor McCay (actually Zenas Winsor McCay) was a Canadian cartoonist and animator. He is best-known for animations like: *Little Nemo* or *Gertie the Dinosaur*, but the one that I am interested in is *The Centaurs* from 1921 (although it has only survived in fragments). In this piece we encounter a whole family of centaurs, a young couple introducing their child-centaur to their elderly parents. We do not observe any scene of violence or aggressiveness – the family seems to live in an idyllic land in harmony with the nature. No rape, no sex scenes—we only see the fruit of this pure love—a frolicking half-foal, half-child centaur.

The Pastoral Symphony: Oppressed Centaurides

In the 1940 *Fantasia* by Walt Disney Productions we encounter centaurs and centaurides meeting for the first time to celebrate their love at the foot of the Mount Olympus. Although once again we do not witness rape as such, we certainly might interpret the depiction of centaurs hiding in the bushes as the "sex scenes". It seems to be the affirmation of the pure and happy life of the magical creatures; however, not all of them are treated with equal respect and dignity. Two of the centaurides: Sunflower and Ottika, depicted as a metaphor for "black" women, serve the white characters, and do not find love partners as the rest do. The mistreatment of these characters was corrected by the fans, who let them into the Disney Arcadia where they found love that had been earlier denied.

Great Fighters, That's All

In the *Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis, centaurs play a secondary role. They are depicted as rather positive characters: they are honourable, intelligent, and loyal. All of them fought in many battles for Aslan. They could foresee the future, which made them great strategists. There are no centaurides in the books, however we meet them in the Disney adaptation of the *Chronicles*, which might indicate a connection to the centaurides from the *Fantasia*. However, these characters (as a species) are barely developed. The famous short story by Neil Gaiman, *The Problem of Susan* would serve as an interesting example for expanding their stories. In some ways it "makes-up" for the sexuality of centaurs that cannot be found in the books meant to be read by children. In this text (evidently intended for adults), Susan looks at the penis of a dead centaur and wonders what their mating habits are. In this case, the reverse castration shows a rewriting of children's literature for adults, which has become a common cultural phenomenon.

Conclusion:

It seems obvious that rape does not fit in children's world (at least in the contemporary Western idea of children)—and rightly so. Sometimes this motif is substituted by "the sex scenes" (vide *Fantasia*, *Harry Potter*) which often are more of a suggestion than a clear clue for interpretation. The wild aspect of centaurs' existence is replaced by their connection to nature. The wisdom of two ancient centaurs is extended to the whole population of the pop-cultural mythical creatures. They can be included in the world of children's culture only under certain conditions, as they perhaps remain too dangerous and too disturbing to meet the mythical child of the 21st century. The centaur have been tamed, and hopefully will never be tempted to rape again.

References:

Kristin M. Barton, Jonathan Malcolm Lampley, *Fun CULTure: Essays on Participatory Fandom in the 21st Century*, (Jefferson NC and London: McFarland, 2013).

Percy Jackson's Mentor

In Percy Jackson's series centaurs once again seem to lack the wildness of their ancient ancestors. The mentor of the main protagonist, Chiron, is director of Camp Half-Blood, seemingly because of his wisdom and patience, known from mythology. Also, when Percy takes a train to Denver, he sees a family of centaurs and once more we encounter the depiction of a child-centaur. In the second book, a centaur organization (Party Ponies) helps the heroes of the novel prove their nobility. They then join Chiron in the big battle, proving their nobility.

Did They Rape Dolores Umbridge?

The Harry Potter universe (books and movies combined) do not introduce the female centaurs to the magical world. However here, unlike in the previous texts, the motif of rape might be associated with its ancient/mythological roots. When Harry and Hermione lure Dolores Umbridge into the Forbidden Forest in *Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix*, they meet centaurs preparing for battle. When they find out that Umbridge is definitely not on their side (she calls them: flighty half-breed, beasts, uncontrolled animals, etc.), they abduct her in order to punish her. Although it is not said explicitly that Umbridge was actually raped—and I am against this interpretation—it can be read as an exploration of the ancient motif of rape, used by J. K. Rowling (vide Barton, Lampley, 2013: pp.42-43). Besides this fragment of the septology, centaurs in the Harry Potter universe are wise, calm, and rather friendly—as long as one shows respect does not insult the inhabitants of the Forbidden Forest.