Elizabeth Hale, "Entry on: My Monster Notebook by John Harris , Mark Todd ", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1019. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

John Harris , Mark Todd

My Monster Notebook

United States of America (2011)

TAGS: Aethon / Ethon (Eagle) Argos / Argus Panoptes (Giant) Briareus / Briareos Cacus Ceto Circe Echidna Erinyes Geryon Graeae / Graiai Hecate Heracles Jason Ladon Lamia Nereid(s) Odysseus / Ulysses Orthrus Poseidon Proteus Python Talos (Automaton) Teumessian Fox Triton Typhon / Typhoeus / Typhaon Zeus





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	My Monster Notebook
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States of America
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2011
First Edition Details	John Harris and Mark Todd, *My Monster Notebook*. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011, 44 pp.
ISBN	9781606060506
Genre	Picture books
Target Audience	Crossover (children, 8–12)
Author of the Entry	Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au
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This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Creators



John Harris , b. 1950
(Author)

John Harris was born in Washington D.C.. He studied at Middlebury College, the University of Virginia, and the University of California at Berkeley. He worked as an editor of museum publications — the Smithsonian and the Getty. He has written for several magazines, including The Atlantic, Harpers, and Esquire. He has written a number of books for children, including *A Giraffe Goes to Paris*, *Pop-up Aesop*, *Strong Stuff: Herakles and his Labors*. He lives in Savannah, Georgia.

Sources:

goodreads.com (accessed: April 16, 2020);

amazon.com (accessed: April 16, 2020).

Bio prepared by Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au



Mark Todd (Illustrator)

Mark Todd is an artist, freelance illustrator and cartoonist. He grew up in California, and studied art at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena. He worked in New York for some years, illustrating for clients such as MTV and the New Yorker, before returning to California. He teaches at the Art Center College of Design, with his partner Esther Pearl Watson, with whom he has written, *Watcha Mean, What's a Zine*, a guide to producing zines. He has illustrated a

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number of children's books, including *My Monster Notebook, Food Trucks!* and *Monster Trucks!*

Sources:

marktoddillustration.com (accessed: April 16, 2020);

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funchicken.bigcartel.com (accessed: April 16, 2020);

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Additional information

Summary

My Monster Notebook is a picture book that gives information about several mythological monsters: Echidna, Orthrus and Geryon, Briareus, Ethon, Argus, Lamia and Keto, the Teuemessian Fox, Hecate, Typhon, Erinyes, Proteus, Cacus, Circe, Triton (and the tritons), Graeae, Nereids, Talos, Python, and Ladon. It is formatted like a young teenager's exercise book for a class project on Monsters, and uses trompe-l'oeil, collage and sketches to present the material. On the inside cover is a note from a 'teacher,' thanking the 'student' for letting him take a look at it: "They show a lot of IMAGINATION and PROMISE… You must have been inspired by your mythology class!" (inside cover).

The style of drawing is deliberately scratchy and amateur, using bright colours, blotches, and images of sticky notes, crossings-out. Quotations from ancient playwrights such as Aeschylus give ideas about how the Greeks saw the monsters of their mythology: "Many are the horrors, dread and appalling, bred of earth, and the arms of the deep teem with hateful monsters." (cover page). The contents page is styled as if torn from an old text book "Introduction to Mythology", with a line drawing of Poseidon on its red cover, and a drawn speech bubble saying "Well, hello there." Those monsters not covered, are crossed out.

Each double-page spread features a different monster. Echidna, "the mother of all monsters", is drawn, and short description appears in print (as if torn from the "Introduction to Mythology". A collage shows aspects of Echidna – caves, snakes, and an Australian echidna (whose baby is known as a 'puggle'). A comment: "She's Beauty and the Beast." Orthrus and Geryon shows a cute-style drawing of a dog with two heads (Orthrus), surrounded by clawed and hairy hands (Geryon). No attempt is made to draw Geryon in his entirety, but comment is made about his make-up: "3 heads, 3 bodies, 6 hands? 2 legs – go figure…" Briareus is drawn in a scratchy manner, with a circled "100 handed!" next to his image. The "Introduction to Mythology" comments: "Zeus later appointed Briareus, his favorite, as his personal bodyguard. A VERY good choice, I'd say." Ethon, the giant eagle follows, with comments like "Now that's a BIG BIRD!" He is drawn standing on a rock in a lake, with a small Prometheus beneath him, saying "not again", while Ethon comments "YUCK-liver every single day?" The story of Argus is dealt with next in characteristic

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style: "The first thing you want to know about Argus is that he had 100 eyes. That's right: 100. Why did Argus have so many eyes? To keep watch over Io. Who was Io?" The myth is explained, and concluded with "And now you know". Argus's image uses plastic 'goggle' eyes, such as the kind attached to cheap toys.

Lamia and Keto follows, with an explanation of their respective myths, and a connection to the poem *Lamia*, by English poet, John Keats, then comes The Teumessian Fox, a giant fox that terrorised Thebes until the King turned loose the magical dog Laelaps, "whose destiny was to catch every single thing he chased after". The humour of the story is expressed: "Zeus, the king of the gods, was now faced with a tricky situation, fate-wise: if you have a fox who can never be caught being chased by a dog who catches everything he runs after, who is going to win? Thinking about this gave Zeus a major headache, and so he turned them both to stone. Which is one way to solve a problem." Hecate follows, with a drawing taped in, of her dressed a little like a punk, with 'T: Trouble,' written underneath. A Fun Fact: "Shakespeare mentions Hecate in two of his best plays: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Macbeth*." Typhon is only partly drawn, alongside images of volcanoes and lightning; the Erinyes are depicted in scratchy line drawing with phrases like "Gotcha!" and "Thought you could get away like it" in speech-bubbles; Proteus is drawn in different shapes (human, animal, monster); Cacus's fate at the hands of Hercules is discussed. Circe's presence in the book is explained: "she's here because she was famous for turning men into monsters and beasts by her use of magical plants and herbs". "I think that I shall never see/ A poem lovely as Circe" appears above a line drawing of Circe, finished off by a wisp of what looks like blond dolls' hair. Triton follows, surrounded by images of coral, and depicted in the form of what looks like a battered plastic image of a merman that has been washed up on a beach. "Hello: my name is: HORROR" accompanies the images of the feature-less Graeae; then a set of numbered drawings of the Nereids fills the following page. Next comes Talos, drawn with a plug in his ankle, with "Do not remove, thanks", written beside it, then Python, drawn coiled up and with large melting eyes with long eyelashes (presumably because she is a female python?). A scene of the stars presents Ladon, with an image of the constellation that bears its name, bringing up the rear. A pronunciation guide concludes the book. The back inside cover provides bibliographical details.

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Analysis	This curious presentation of a set of mythical monsters was commissioned by the Getty Museum in Los Angeles, which may explain its post-modern appearance. Its mixture of comedy, irony, puns, jokes, collage, drawing, trompe-l'oeil and hand-made images, provides an amusing entry into the subject, and its coverage of an unusual array of monsters (mostly lesser-known, with some exceptions) is striking. The book is deliberately unattractive, in that it does not contain glossy or delicate images, but uses the concept of a (sardonic) student's collection of images to present the different monsters, and to highlight the stranger or more revolting aspects of these figures. The approach is designed to make traditionally 'boring' subjects appealing to modern children. The presentation is broadly accurate, with a sense of the interconnectedness of the monsters (many related to Echidna, for instance), and of the paradoxical humour of Greek mythology.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aethon / Ethon (Eagle) Argos / Argus Panoptes (Giant) Briareus / Briareos Cacus Ceto Circe Echidna Erinyes Geryon Graeae / Graiai Hecate Heracles Jason Ladon Lamia Nereid(s) Odysseus / Ulysses Orthrus Poseidon Proteus Python Talos (Automaton) Teumessian Fox Triton Typhon / Typhoeus / Typhaon Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adolescence Communication Learning School Teachers

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