Miriam Riverlea, "Entry on: Greece! Rome! Monsters! by Calef Brown, John Harris ", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1138. Entry version as of November 06, 2026.

Calef Brown , John Harris

Greece! Rome! Monsters!

United States of America (2002)

TAGS: Basilisk Bellerophon Centaur(s) Cerberus Charybdis Chimera / Chimaera Cyclops / Cyclopes Griffins / Gryphons Harpies Hippocampi Manticore Medusa Minotaur Odysseus / Ulysses Oedipus Pan Pegasus Phoenix (Bird) Poseidon Scylla Sirens Sphinx Unicorn (hippos monokeras)





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

General information	
Title of the work	Greece! Rome! Monsters!
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2002
First Edition Details	John Harris, ill. Calef Brown, *Greece! Rome! Monsters!* Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2002, 48 pp. (unpaginated).
ISBN	9780892366187
Genre	Anthology*, Mythologies, Picture books
Target Audience	Children (recommended for ages 4–11 years)
Author of the Entry	Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com
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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



Calef Brown (Illustrator)

Illustrator, author and poet Calef Brown was born in Shreveport, Louisiana, and spent his childhood in the north east of the United States. He studied illustration at the Pratt Institute and the Art Centre College of Design in Pasadena, California, and has taught at the Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles, the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, and the Maine College of Art in Portland. Working predominantly in acrylic and gouache on paper, his style has been described as "post-modern folk art", with bright colours and surreal elements. He has stated that his poems and artwork are influenced by wordplay, dreams, and his travels in southern India.

His first book, *Polkabats and Octopus Slacks: 14 Stories* (1998), won the Marion Vannett Ridgeway Award for Poetry. He has since published five collections of his own poems and stories, as well as illustrating the work of F. Scott Fitzgerald and Edward Lear, and collaborating with other children's writers including John Harris, Daniel Pinkwater, and Hege Siri. He regularly tours schools, and also engages in freelance work for adult audiences. He lives in Maine.

Sources:

Official website (accessed: October 19, 2020).

Profile at poetryfoundation.org (accessed: October 19, 2020).

Jules, *Seven Questions—And a Little Bit of Soup—Over Breakfast with Calef Brown*, blaine.org, published April 14, 2009 (accessed: October 19, 2020).

Bio prepared by Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com

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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).

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Additional information

Summary

Greece! Rome! Monsters! is an illustrated anthology of mythological creatures from the classical tradition. Organised alphabetically, it introduces young readers to twenty monsters, including well known characters like the Cyclops, Medusa, and the Minotaur, alongside more obscure figures such as the Basilisk and Manticore. In addition to the fearsome beasts are more pleasant equine creatures, the Hippocamp, Pegasus and the Unicorn. Curiously the Hydra does not feature, but the collection does include the Salamander, described as "a little weirdo snake-lizard kind of thing" whose "main claim to fame was that it could live in fire without getting burned." It is the only "real" animal in the book.

The written text opens with an introduction warning readers to "read on if you dare!" Brown's language is witty and casual, with numerous informal asides and digressions. Exclamation marks, parentheses, and dashes are used liberally. The phrases only rarely rhyme, but the line breaks convey a strong sense of rhythm and metre. A number of the entries conclude with an affirmation that either celebrates the monster or else their vanquisher: "*Giddy-up, hippocamp!*" and on the Harpies' page: "Let's hear it for the two sons of the North Wind!" At the back of the book is a Monster Quiz, with ten questions testing comprehension and close reading, and a pronunciation guide.

Calef Brown's colourful, surreal artworks highlight the quirky elements of each monster, rendering them figures of fun rather than fear. The Centaur is dressed in a black leather biker's vest, while the Sirens look like big-mouthed cabaret singers with wild hairdos. Bodily forms are exaggerated and out of proportion, with hands, heads and tails frequently rendered larger than life. On each double page spread, one or two colours dominate. Some of the background landscapes feature classical buildings and the heroes are arrayed in ancient armour, but the lurid colours and strange plants suggest a fantasy rather than historical setting.

Analysis

In spite of the book's exclamatory title, the Greek myths dominate the collection. Besides the variation between fauns and satyrs, Rome is barely mentioned. Yet the book does subtly highlight how myths were appropriated by different cultures. Brown's illustration of the Sphinx

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resembles the pose and physique of the edifice in Egypt, and Harris seems to be referring to both ancient and modern iconography when he says "You can see Sphinxes anywhere, everywhere – paintings of them, statues, Sphinxes crouching on clocks, carved on jewels, etc., etc." As is often the case within the context of children's literature, Oedipus' encounter with the Sphinx ends with his solving of the infamous riddle, and no mention is made of the rest of his subsequent fate.

The book repeatedly acknowledges the reception of these monsters within the classical tradition. The introduction points out that "They show up in books and poems, in paintings, as sculptures – they're everywhere." Harris recommends that if they are ever in New York or Paris, readers should view the medieval Unicorn Tapestries. There are references to the ways that mythology has infiltrated the English language, including the terms panic, siren song, harpy, and chimera. More sophisticated forms of reception in art, music and literature are also noted, such as Pablo Picasso's use of the Minotaur in his paintings, Claude Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*, and D.H. Lawrence's interest in the Phoenix as a symbol of "Immortality! Life! | and other good things". The volume was produced by the Getty Museum in California, and seems intended to introduce children to mythological elements in European art.

Harris and Brown's book is one of very few children's mythological stories that has received considerable academic attention. Sheila Murnaghan* notes the volume's "conflicted" attitude towards learning, in which the "fun" and the "educational" elements are separated out, while Barbara Weinlich** compares its visual style and signification of monstrosity with British author Sara Fanelli's *Mythological Monsters of Ancient Greece* (2002).

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* Sheila Murnaghan, "Classics for the Cool Kids: Popular and Unpopular Versions of Antiquity for Children", *The Classical World* 104 (2011): 339–353.

** Barbara Weinlich, "The Metanarrative of Picture Books: 'Reading' Greek Myth for (and to) Children" in Lisa Maurice, ed., *The Reception of Ancient Greece and Rome in Children's Literature: Heroes and Eagle*s, Leiden: Brill, 2015.

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Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Basilisk Bellerophon Centaur(s) Cerberus Charybdis Chimera / Chimaera Cyclops / Cyclopes Griffins / Gryphons Harpies Hippocampi Manticore Medusa Minotaur Odysseus / Ulysses Oedipus Pan Pegasus Phoenix (Bird) Poseidon Scylla Sirens Sphinx Unicorn (hippos monokeras)
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Appearances Heritage Heroism Humour Names Storytelling Supernatural creatures (non-classical) Tradition
Further Reading	Murnaghan, Sheila, "Classics for the Cool Kids: Popular and Unpopular Versions of Antiquity for Children", *The Classical World* 104 (2011): 339–353. Weinlich, Barbara, "The Metanarrative of Picture Books: 'Reading' Greek Myth for (and to) Children" in Lisa Maurice, ed., *The Reception of Ancient Greece and Rome in Children's Literature: Heroes and Eagles*, Leiden: Brill, 2015.

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