P. MURGATROYD, *MYTHICAL MONSTERS IN CLASSICAL LITERATURE*. London: Duckworth, 2007. Pp. x + 200, 16 illus. ISBN 978-0-7156-3627-5. £16.99.

Any goal as impossible as identifying and organizing the monsters of classical myth is bound to stimulate interesting attempts. Treating classical literature from Homer to Apuleius as a whole, Murgatroyd surveys an inherently appealing and lively theme, as read through Greek and Latin sources in translation, for first-level undergraduate courses on myth and the non-specialist reader. One recurring strategy for enlivening these narratives (for narratology is the approach recommended to readers) is the discussion of modern interpretations of classical monsters in various media. Although several artworks (nearly half of them post-classical) form illustrations, the focus of the book is — unusually — literary and not art-historical. It also treats dozens of different creatures. It therefore usefully complements the majority of existing scholarship on classical monsters, which usually has a narrower and/or primarily visual focus.

With no index locorum, this book is not designed for studying particular texts or authors. Its main concern is the emotional and imaginative responses provoked by texts featuring monsters. M. undertakes both to lead an arc of intellectual development through the book, and to make chapters stand alone. The latter aim impedes the former when basic information is repeated, such as what Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is (97 and 105), but will allow certain chapters to appear individually on reading lists ('Polyphemus' or 'Jason and the Argonauts' presumably more often than 'Other Winged Monsters').

This structure is necessarily idiosyncratic. A brief but excellent Introduction defines the monster as a threatening, abnormal being, supplying the necessary caveats that this does not always work. Assaulting undergraduate prejudices about the blank, decorous remoteness of antiquity, the first chapter examines types of monster associated with Gothic literature and horror films: if we look for them, there are classical precedents (e.g. the 'vampiric' Furies and Trimalchio's werewolf). Ch. 2 introduces narratological reading, through the camera metaphor: pacing, surprises, and other effects are achieved in portrayals of monsters by Homer or Manilius just as in television or cinema. The remaining chapters are thematic: ch. 3 treats Virgil's episode of Laocoon and the snakes and its place in the *Aeneid*, ch. 4 compares literary portrayals of the Sirens from Homer into the Renaissance, and ch. 5 surveys other winged creatures (Stymphalian birds, griffins, Sphinx, and Harpies). A 'biography' of Theseus provides the framework for the Minotaur, Calydonian boar, and Centaurs in ch. 6. Ch. 7 is devoted to Chiron, ch. 8 to Scylla and Medusa as once-human monsters through whom Ovid displays characteristic revisionism and wit. Ch. 9 is an extended comparison of two Argonautic narratives: Apollonius' poem, and the 1963 movie *Jason and the Argonauts* (the latter is treated facetiously, a foil to the superior art and subtlety of the former). Chs 10 and 11, focusing on Heracles and Perseus, demonstrate Propp's Formalist analysis of narrative, schematizing monster-combat stories from classical (and other) legends into thirty-one 'functions' such as Departure, Journey and Pursuit. Finally, ch. 12 surveys developments in tales about Polyphemus in Greek, Roman, and later literature, with a two-page coda on other giant enemies in classical myth.

On p. 146, M. warns against treating all Greek and Roman sources as a unified and unchanging body of myth, but chapter-choosing readers might mistakenly assume otherwise. The lack of room for contextualizing sources fully may also mislead inexperienced students, e.g. when versions of Medusa's slaying are quoted in order of narrative richness (Apollodorus, Ovid, Pseudo-Hesiod) rather than chronological order. Conversely, mythographic information is sometimes packed fearsomely densely, as when the three complicated embedded narratives of *Metamorphoses* 2 are epitomized in two paragraphs (99–100). Glimpses of the post-classical tradition are frequent, but usually tongue-in-cheek. Each chapter ends with an exercise in practical criticism, either of a cited passage or a larger text. Some are ancient sources, but only degree courses with a broader literary focus, or casual readers with sufficient leisure and interest, will follow instructions to read *Frankenstein*, *Beowulf* and Margaret Atwood. Like many of the book's features, this reveals the diversity of the author's enthusiasm for classical legends, and his resourcefulness in communicating it to new audiences.

Non-academic readers will enjoy this book. As a teaching tool, in sympathetic hands, it will engage first-year students. However, its dated methodology (and bibliography of works cited) unfortunately prevents it from being more than a treasury of mythical content and a primer in practical criticism.

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