

## **Monsters at the Dawn of Reason**

Monsters have stalked humanity from its earliest origins, leaving their tracks across folklore and religion, in written texts and pictorial artifacts. The dog-headed Anubis has stood watch for centuries on ancient Egyptian tombs. The snake-haired Medusa chases argonauts on Grecian urns. Here at the crossroads of Central Asia, where *LCE* is published, the Slavic forest monster Leshy shambles through Pushkin's verses into Vladimir Vysotsky's gravel-voiced songs. The pre-Islamic demiurge of the Turkic peoples, the evil Erlik Khan – more at home on our steppes – slinks from Kyrgyz runes into popular science fiction. Every culture is haunted by these hybrid beings, somewhere between the anthropomorphic and the xenomorphic, the normative and the deformed, if only because every culture is itself a hybrid being. In its monsters, the ego-image of a culture collides with what it fears and abhors.

With the spread of mass literacy from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onward, the monstrous was framed within a new set of contraries, exemplified in Goya's watchword for modernity: "The sleep of reason breeds monsters." That same 18<sup>th</sup> century theorized the journey from childhood to adulthood for the first time in modern terms, as a consciousness raising from ignorance – in the view of the Enlightenment philosophers – or conversely as a rude awakening from innocence – as their Romantic coevals preferred. Janus-like monsters appeared in that dawn. Hoffman's Sandman. Gogol's Vyi. Washington Irving's Headless Horseman. Perhaps the most fertile of these early modern monsters, in terms of its progeny in culture, was Mary Shelley's "Modern Prometheus," a self-educated innocent who on the one hand mastered the knowledge of his time, on the other hand lived in perpetual discontent with ... his creator? ... or was it rather: with what he had used that knowledge to create?

The contributors to this volume on artworks for children track down the monsters in Goya's "sleep of reason," while also asking questions that come naturally to modern educators: what role do these monsters play at the *dawn* of reason, in the early stages of literacy? Katie Reschenhofer in her piece on monsters in multimodal picture books argues that they embody and convey abstract emotions, encouraging the positive pretence in children that regulates emotion and identity formation. Joti Bilkhu looks specifically at the monstrous "other mother" in Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*, interpreting the book and film as cautionary tales on the destructive power of any static, idealized selfhood. Saraliza

Anzaldua again puts the focus on a single monster – the bogeyman – only traces it through artworks in various media in order to show how the journey to adulthood is not so much a one-way trip as we imagine. Finally, Tiffany Anderson critiques 19<sup>th</sup> century children’s books in which real human beings are depicted as monsters in the service of an aggressive ideology. These essays by committed educators are delightful combinations of theory and research that leave us with challenging insights. It has been my pleasure to bring them all together.

As we contemplate monsters in artworks for children, and the value of pretence – positive or otherwise – perhaps we should keep an eye on artworks ostensibly for adults, a monsters’ ball indeed these days, undreamed of by Goya, and rollicking moreover on a global scale. Here in Almaty, Gogol himself slays monsters at the cineplex, along with Van Helsing and the Brothers Grimm. *Stranger Things* and *Goosebumps* and the latest Steven King stream on our devices, in the original English and with dubbing or subtitles in all our local languages. Monsters seem increasingly to cross the line that modernity has drawn between artworks for children and artworks for adults – as they also transgress among languages, cultures, and nations. Perhaps that’s no surprise in such a permeable world; in our post-truth age, it may simply be their return to form. Monsters at the dawn of reason bring Goya’s watchword to mind – not only as an admonition for educators teaching children to read and think critically – but as a warning of what our children may eventually encounter, in the Russian expression, “*sred’ bela dnya*” – in the clear light of day.

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