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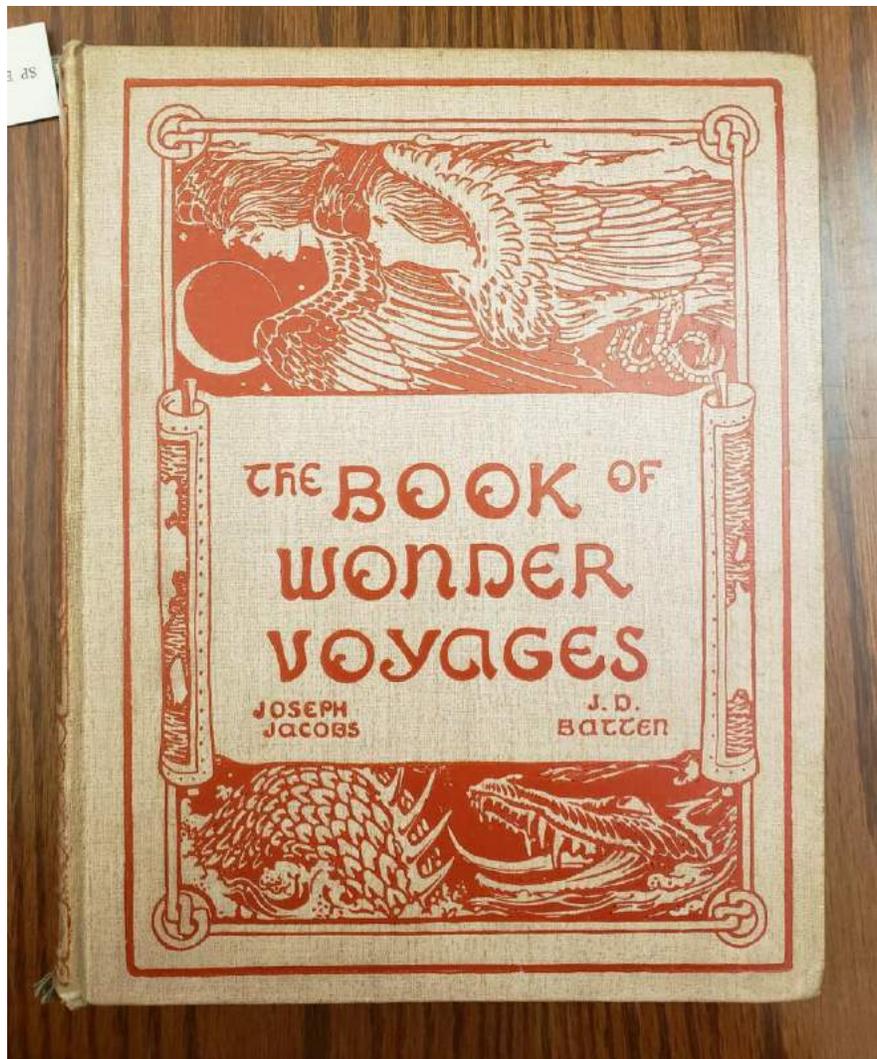
ENGL 362

19 March 2020

Rare Books and Special Collections Five Fairy Tales Assignment:

The Monstrous in Victorian Fairy Tales

For my five illustrated Victorian fairy tales, I chose the theme of monsters. The Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘monster’ as follows: “Originally: a mythical creature which is part animal and part human, or combines elements of two or more animal forms, and is frequently of great size and ferocious appearance. Later, more generally: any imaginary creature that is large, ugly, and frightening.” I found each tale compelling for different reasons, sometimes only partially due to the ostensible monster. The various creatures depicted bring out themes of morality, hybridity, appearance, responsibility, and the unknown.



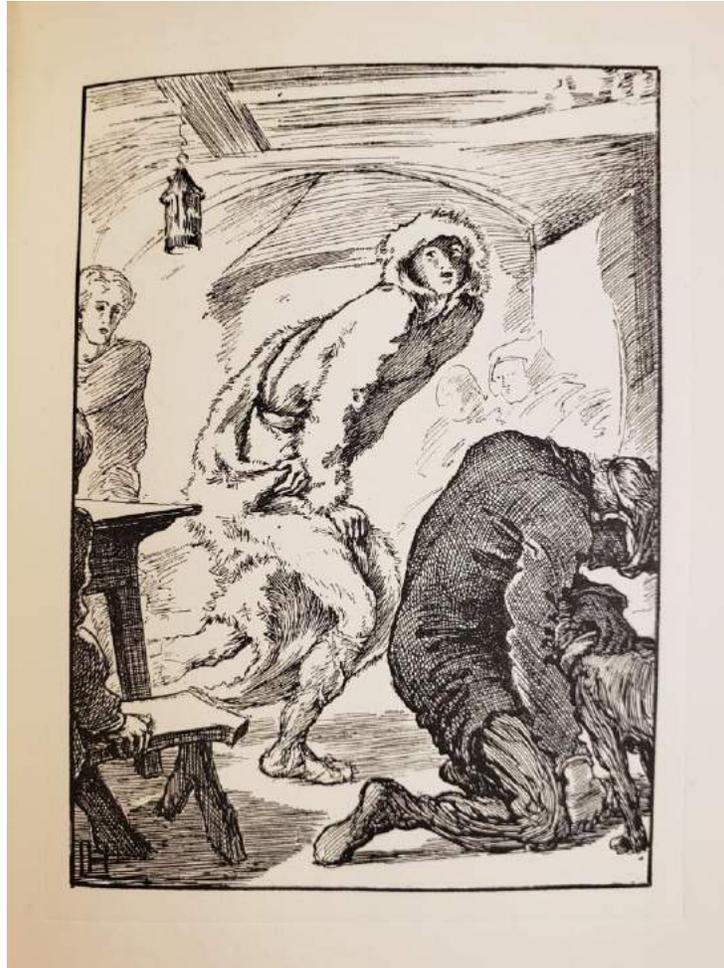
Jacobs, Joseph, ed. *The Book of Wonder Voyages*. Illustrated by John D. Batten. London, D. Nutt, 1896. Cover.

A life-long love of Greek myth meant I had to have at least one Ancient Greek story in my collection (I ended up with two); “The Argonauts” in *The Book of Wonder Voyages* was an easy choice due to John D. Batten’s beautiful illustrations. I love his use of bold line drawing on the cover and in the foreground of the image of Medea and Orpheus (55) (as opposed to sketchier outlines), and think the framing makes this second illustration stand out in particular. Medea’s stark whiteness draws the eye to her immediately, while the detail in the background of the golden fleece and the forest becomes noticeable more gradually. The way Orpheus and the snake frame Medea make her the true centre of the image. This made it particularly compelling

given the events surrounding the illustration. Shortly afterwards, Medea will murder her young brother Absyrtus and throw him overboard so her father will stop the pursuit of the Argonauts to bury the boy (56); the image and text seem to be begging the question of who – the snake or the woman – is the true monster.



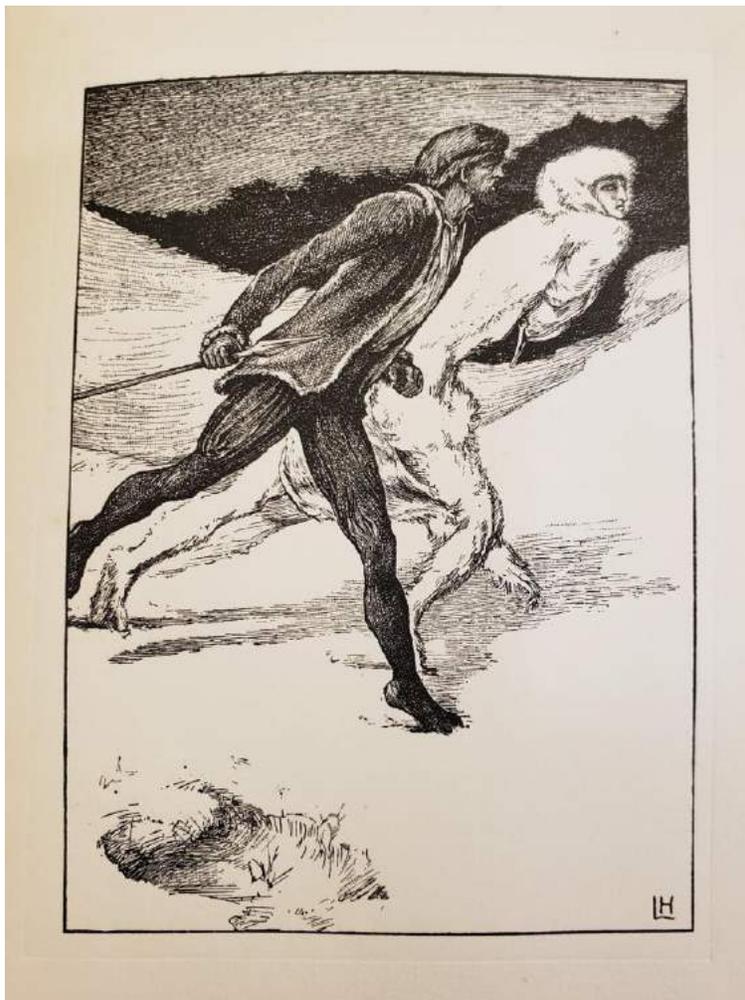
Jacobs, Joseph, ed. *The Book of Wonder Voyages*. Illustrated by John D. Batten. London, D. Nutt, 1896. p. 55.



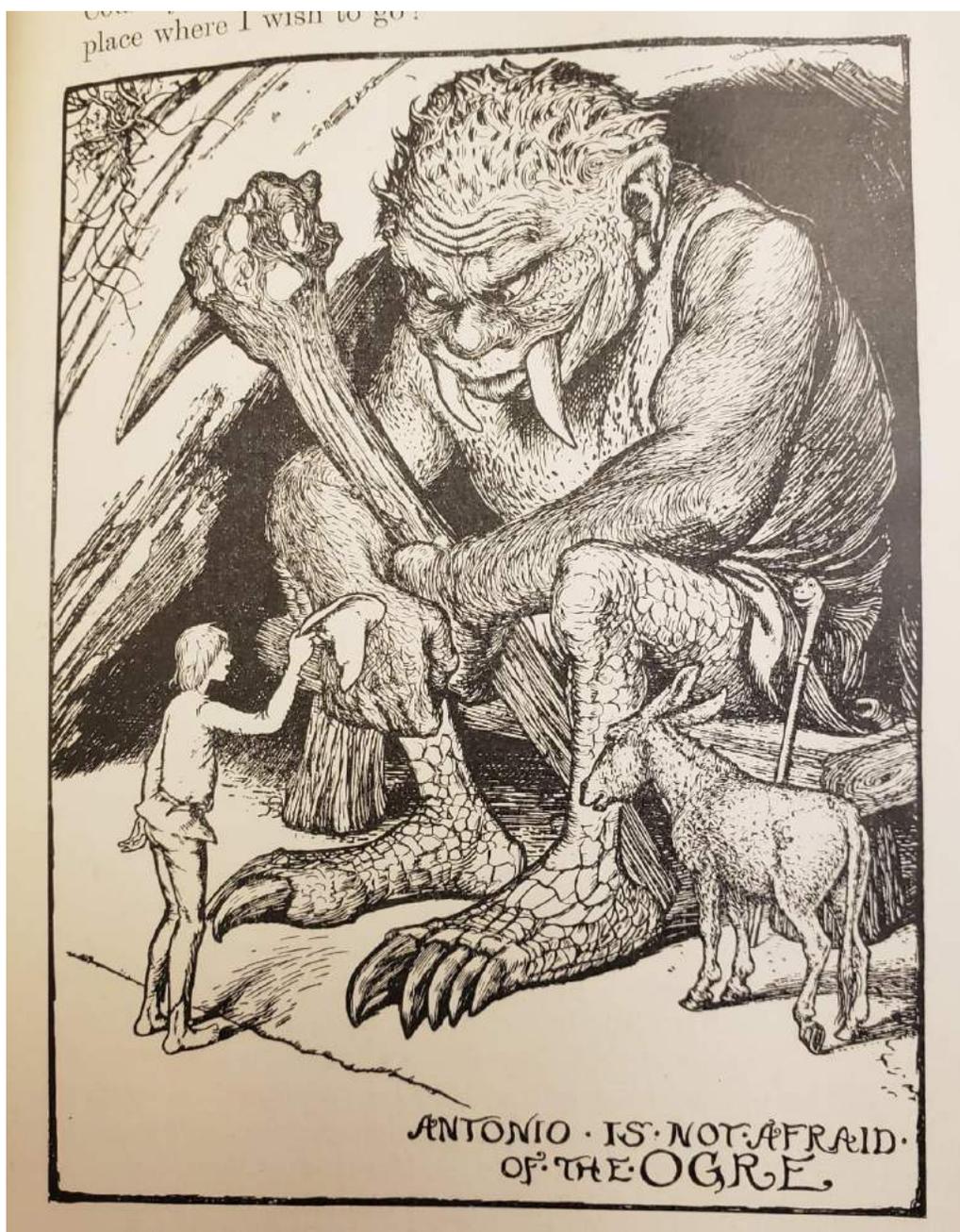
Housman, Clemence Annie. *The Were-Wolf*. Illustrated by Laurence Housman. London, John Lane at the Bodley Head, 1896. p. 63.

Clemence Housman's *The Were-Wolf* depicts one of the most classic monsters, but not in the way a modern reader might expect. Not only is the were-wolf, despite its associations with violence and ferocity, a woman, but White Fell also has more control over her transformations than in the usual full-moon mythos; her restrained monstrosity is perhaps more chilling due to the intentionality with which it is wielded. I love the images in this tale for the faithfulness with which they evoke aspects of the text. For example, I think the androgyny of White Fell is interesting in the context of the story. Her dress is described as “half masculine, yet not unwomanly” (23), and the illustrations likewise present a not-unfeminine figure that could

equally be construed as an effeminate man; the white fur clings to her body to hide (and simultaneously reveal) her true form (63 and 83) while also suggesting a dangerous non-binary sexuality. White Fell is “abhorrent” to man and beast – the pack of wolves slink aside at her trail (92) – such that her hybridity makes her monstrously “Other,” both in human-animal and male-female binaries. Meanwhile, her association with whiteness, usually symbolic of purity, is particularly evident in “The Race,” where Christian appears dark and ominous. The Housman’s play with conventions, making White Fell apparently innocent and vulnerable in both images, and thus in actuality more dangerous for the way she hides in plain sight.



Housman, Clemence Annie. *The Were-Wolf*. Illustrated by Laurence Housman. London, John Lane at the Bodley Head, 1896. p. 83, “The Race.”

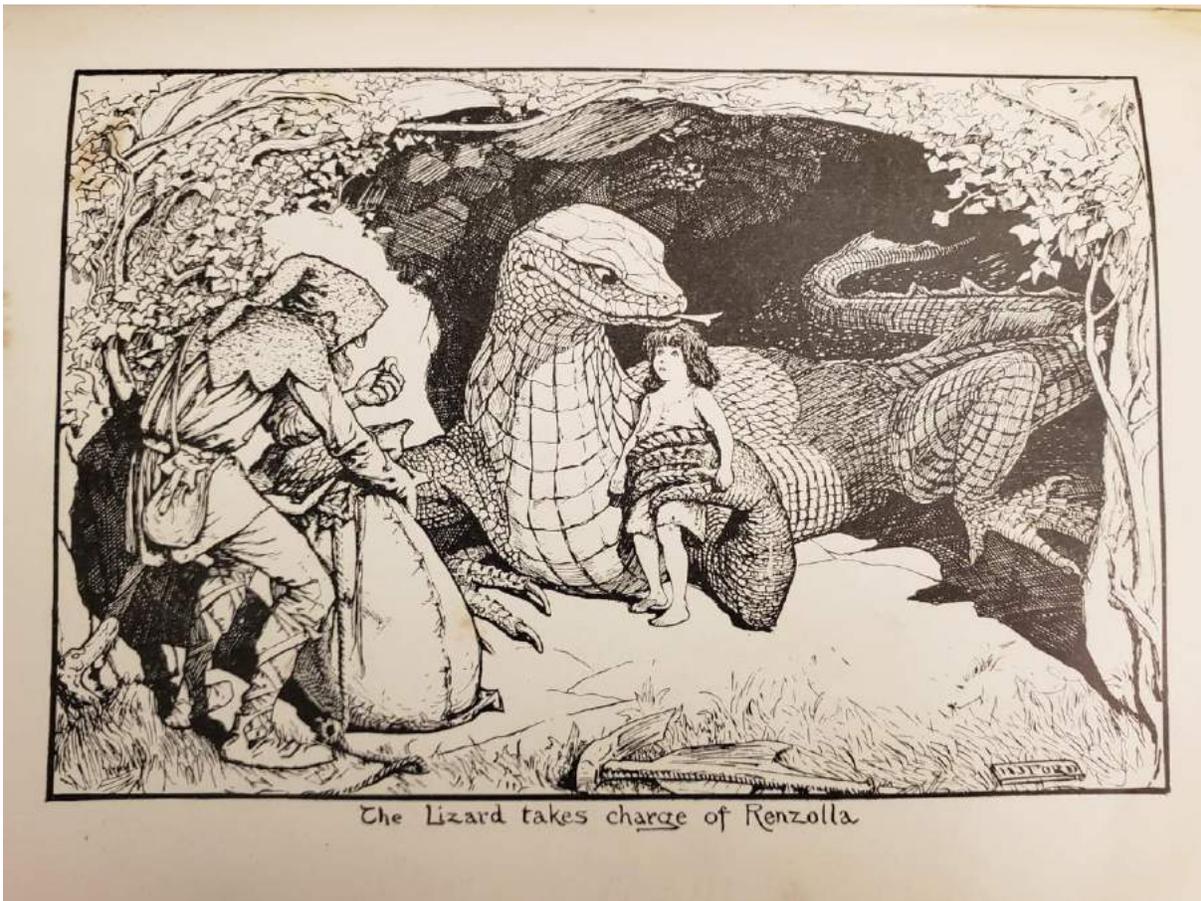


Lang, Andrew, ed. *The Grey Fairy Book*. Illustrated by H.J. Ford. London, Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900. p. 345.

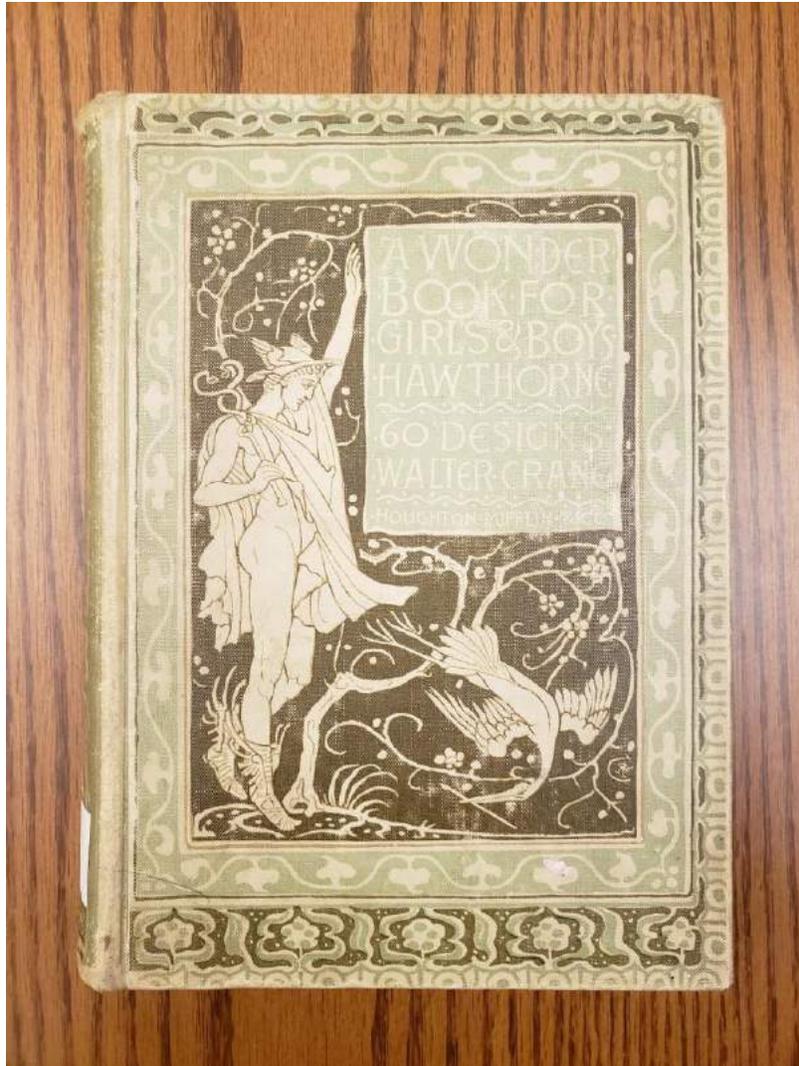
The *Grey Fairy Book* contains a number of monsters; unlike my other choices, here I am not focused on a particular tale but in how they reinforce and contradict one another. The eponymous Ogre in “The Ogre” looks terrifying and malicious; he glares down at Antonio in a way that tells the reader he is threatening, yet “has a very kind heart” and actually helps the

hapless young man. In “The Goat-Faced Girl,” the fairy that takes Renzolla in first appears as a giant lizard (85) but is in fact generous to her and punishes her to make her a better person.

These monsters are both portrayed menacingly but are in actuality kind; rather than “monsters,” they might better be described as other-than-human creatures that appear threatening due to their otherness. As such, these tales encourage readers to look beyond exteriors in making judgements of one another.



Lang, Andrew, ed. *The Grey Fairy Book*. Illustrated by H.J. Ford. London, Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900. p. 85.



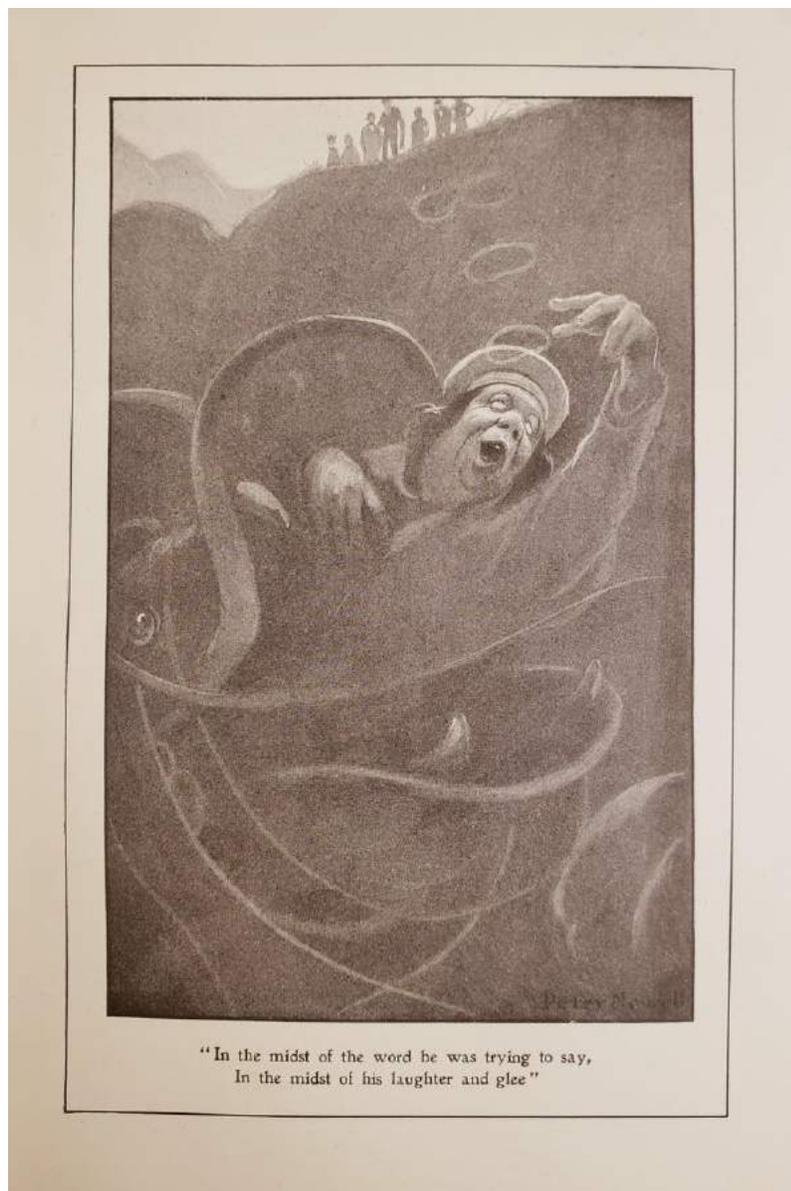
Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *A Wonder Book for Girls and Boys*. Illustrated by Walter Crane. Boston, Houghton, Mifflin, 1893, ©1892. Cover.

*A Wonder Book for Girls and Boys* tells several Greek myths and is gorgeously illustrated by Walter Crane. The colouring especially is stunning and makes these images seem less brooding and more lively, particularly alongside the other texts I have chosen. The monsters I selected here are not ones commonly associated with Greek myth, but the Troubles that escape from Pandora's box to plague the world. They appear as "a crowd of ugly little shapes, with bats' wings... and armed with terribly long stings in their tails," but represent "everything that has since afflicted the souls and bodies of mankind" (93). I love the motion with which they are

drawn; they seem to be billowing out of the box like noxious fumes. I think Crane's choice to represent Pandora and Epimetheus as adults, despite Hawthorne's title of "The Paradise of Children," is interesting for a children's book; while the text gives the impression they are young, naïve, and as a result, foolish, the images make a viewer more apt to blame them as adults. Much as the illustration of Medea, I think this image contributes to a perception of humanity common in Greek myth, of humans as fatally flawed and capable of monstrous deeds.



Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *A Wonder Book for Girls and Boys*. Illustrated by Walter Crane. Boston, Houghton, Mifflin, 1893, ©1892. p. 93.

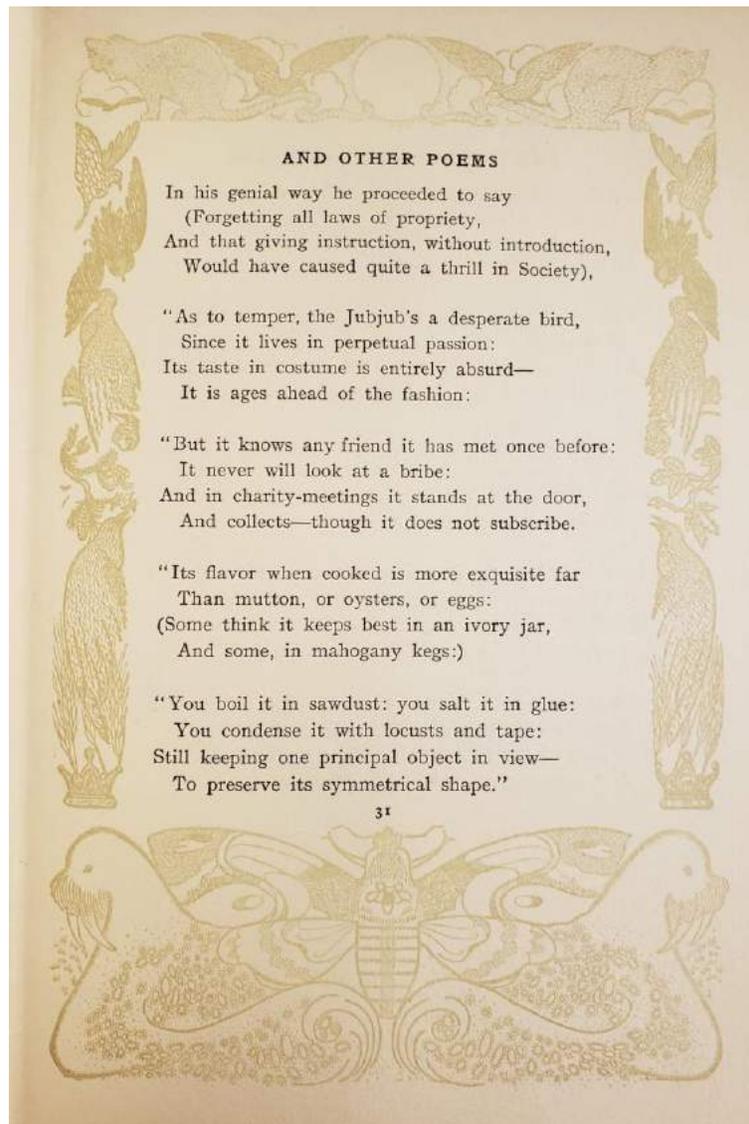


"In the midst of the word he was trying to say,  
In the midst of his laughter and glee"

Lewis, Carroll. *The Hunting of the Snark and Other Poems and Verses*. Illustrated by Peter Newell. New York, Harper & Brothers, 1903. p. 41.

I chose the "Hunting of the Snark" in part because I loved nonsense poetry as a child (and still do). Appreciating words for their sound rather than meaning, and making up my own fantastical definitions, made poems like "The Jabberwocky" fun, and I think children generally have more appreciation for the uncertain and chaotic than adults. I like Peter Newell's illustrations for their actual attempt to depict such unformed creatures as the Bandersnatch and

Snark (or rather, Boojum). I especially like the mystery of the Boojum and its tentacular evocation of the deep sea and, I think, the unknown that lives therein (41). It appears to be vanishing along with the Baker, such that while the image gives the reader something to grasp, it also leaves the creature open to our own shadowy interpretation. In addition, the border designs on the unillustrated pages are beautifully detailed; I like how the plants and animals depicted swirl together and the variety from page to page.



Lewis, Carroll. *The Hunting of the Snark and Other Poems and Verses*. Illustrated by Peter Newell. New York, Harper & Brothers, 1903. p. 31.

As a young reader, I would not have liked all of these tales; I hated scary stories, and so monsters might seem a questionable choice of theme. On the other hand, I disliked didactic stories that handed me a moral. For this reason, I think monsters are compelling. They pose questions about what it means to be human and other-than-human and thus allow exploration of the issues morals often address without offering readers a simple answer; the monsters and humans above are alive in their complexity, expressed in text and image.

Wordcount: 1121

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