

Domesticating Classical Monsters on BBC Children's Television: Gorgons, Minotaurs and Sirens in *Doctor Who*, *the Sarah Jane Adventures* and *Atlantis*

When screening classical monsters the recent trend has been to domesticate them by making them:

- a. 'Realistic', and so they are not supernatural creatures, rather they are aliens or machines and/or
- b. Sympathetic, so that they are no longer evil creatures to be killed by a hero and/or
- c. Eroticised, in the case of female monsters

This trend is evident in recent BBC series for children and family audiences.

In *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, a *Doctor Who* spinoff series for younger viewers first aired on the BBC in the CBBC (Children's BBC) 'teatime' slot, the young protagonists and their mentor Sarah Jane face a monstrous Gorgon in the two-part episode 'The Eyes of the Gorgon (1.3-4, 2007). The Gorgons from Greek mythology are found to be a race of aliens intent on infiltrating earth, and only information gained from reading books on Greek mythology can help the children defeat these monsters.

The long-running BBC science fiction series *Doctor Who* and the short-lived BBC *Atlantis* were both aired early on Saturday evenings, aimed to appeal to children and families. In new *Doctor Who* episode 'The Curse of the Black Spot' (6.3, 2011) a Siren prays on the sick and injured aboard a pirate ship. This beautiful and seemingly deadly creature turns out to be a holographic doctor who is treating her supposed 'victims' aboard her space ship. In the same season of *Doctor Who* 'The God Complex' (6.11, 2011) features an alien Minotaur, who in death is likened to the Doctor and thus made sympathetic. In *Atlantis* Medusa is one of the main characters in early episodes, a friend to the series protagonists Jason and Pythagoras and girlfriend to Hercules. When she gets turned into a Gorgon she is still sympathetic, finally sacrificing herself to help save the city of Atlantis. The Minotaur appears

only in the pilot episode 'The Earth Bull', and as in 'The God Complex' is made sympathetic, as in death the Minotaur turns into a man who is happy to be released from a curse.

In this paper I discuss how classical monsters have been domesticated for children and family audiences. I draw on feedback received from viewers at a public screening of 'The Earth Bull' and 'The God Complex' at the Petrie Museum in 2016 aimed at families, and accompanied by a Gorgon mask making workshop for children, and also from young students aged 11 – 15 who have taken part in a course I have developed on Greek myth on film and television with UK education charity the Brilliant Club.